

THE
RELAPSE,
A
NOVEL.
IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOLUME I.



L O N D O N :
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THE
RELAPSE,
A
NOVEL.

LETTER I.

Miss Hastings to Mrs. Sidley.

I Long exceedingly to see you,
my dear cousin, and no less do
I long to see your *caro sposo*.

I always expected you would
make some such romantic marriage.
For a town-bred damsel, never was
there such a female Quixote: you

VOL. I.

B

have

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have from your infancy dreamt of nothing but imaginary heroes, wonderful adventures, and everlasting love. With great sensibility, a high idea of virtue, a warm imagination, and a pensive turn, you are more qualified to figure as a shepherdess of Arcadia, than a London *belle*.

We should have exchanged stations, child; for while you would have been delighted to doze away an idle life by the side of some purling stream, I die for the dear pleasures of the *beau monde*: from which, without some propitious turn of fortune, I fear I must for ever be debarred. A small fortune, for such, large as my father's estate is, mine will be, since, from family-pride,
all

all his riches are to center in his hopeful heir ;—this father holding every thing in contempt but hounds and horses ; esteeming an English country gentleman the noblest of all possible beings ; despising the town-bred gentry as a degenerate race of effeminate mortals ; — what hopes for me, that I should ever be released from this our enchanted castle, without some courteous knight should deliver me from one bondage, to entangle me in a perhaps worse ; and that for life ? My father indeed tells me, that he will, in proper time, provide a husband for me. Girls should have no choice in those matters.

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He has endeavoured to qualify me for a notable housewife ; such as he can recommend to a friend, to make his puddings, and oversee his dairy, I presume. Charming !—to be sure, he has succeeded most wonderfully in his plan of education.

He says, that giving fortunes with daughters, has been the bane of matrimony. May be so ; but the evil is now past a cure ; and, upon his plan, he may find it no easy matter to get me off his hands. Love, my dear cousin, disinterested love, is almost as much banished from the country as the town : I have indeed half an hundred admirers ; but when that sober crotch-
et,

A N O V E L. 5

et, Matrimony, enters their heads,
they wed,

As Lovelace marry'd Lady Jenny :
Not for her charms, but ready penny.

He may indeed, in time, find
some musty old batchelor, who, ha-
ving paid his fruitless addresses to
half the fortunes in the parish, at
last, rather than want an heir to his
estate, will condescend to take a
handsome young girl, without a por-
tion, for that laudable purpose, to
whom he will allow meat, drink, and
decent cloathing, the run of his
house, and the honour of his bed ; ex-
pecting a wonderful deal of gratitude
and submission for the favour : but

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if such a one should be *forced* upon me, let him take the consequence ; he will meet with his match.

Love, my dear, is not with me a necessary ingredient to happiness : I have never yet experienced the slightest touch of that delectable passion ; and would hope, that I am so constitutionally indifferent, the little blind God will never have power to wound me. Power, riches, admiration, freedom, gaiety ! — ah, what need of love to make the cup of life go down. I will not call it the bitter cup, since I see a thousand blooming pleasures courting the acceptance of those distinguished mortals on whom Fortune deigns to smile.

But,

But, *a-propos*, now we are upon the chapter of love, I must beg a full and particular account of your last desperate adventure. You whisk-ed into matrimony on such a sudden, that you seemed to have been out of breath when you wrote your last short note: I cannot call it a letter—"I am married! I tremble! what have I done? O duty! O my father!" with half an hundred more O's: from which I am to guess, that you have acted contrary to those sublime ideas you used to sermonize so prettily upon, in regard to filial duty, prudence, and all that. Tell me all; nothing extenuate, nor write too bitter things against thyself; for, near as I deemed thee to perfection, I still remem-

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bered, spite of thy angel-form, that thou wast mortal.

Adieu. My good aunt,—did you ever know a country 'squire without a maiden-sister to torment his daughter? they are as constantly found in an old Gothic mansion, as family-pictures and stags' horns in the hall, and are almost as useful and ornamental;—I must attend her, as usual, to learn notability, to inspect her pickles and preserves, to rate the servants, and hear a chapter half read, half spelt, from Baxter's Saints Everlasting Rest. Heavens! how little does she profit by it; for she is in everlasting motion!—I come, I come.

Your's, my dear, most sincerely,

CLARA HASTINGS.

LETTER II.

Mrs. Sidley to Miss Hastings.

PERFECTION!—O my dear cousin, how far, far distant, was I ever from that! and now, how have I forfeited all pretensions to it! I who could, you say (and deeply does it reproach me) talk so well. But you shall hear the particulars, my dear; and then, if possible, find some extenuation for my fault, and help me to be reconciled to myself; to my incensed father, I fear, alas! I never shall! and yet his conduct—How naturally do we, like our first mother, seek to lessen our guilt, by throwing the blame on others!

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Too susceptible, as you say, my Clara, and perhaps a little romantic also, all the ever-to-be-respected lessons imbibed from my most respectable mother, were not able to preserve me from error, in the dangerous situation to which I was exposed. My father's friend and patron, Sir George Selby, beheld me with a fatal partiality: it was our interest to oblige him; he had free access to our house at all times: though a known libertine, yet his manners were, in the highest degree, decent and insinuating; remarkably handsome in his person too:—what a dangerous companion for a young unexperienced girl, too soon, alas, deprived of the protection of a mother! It was not in

his power, had he been inclined, to pay me his honourable addresſes. Separated from a wife, whom he had married from mercenary motives, he had no hand to beſtow.

My ſituation was inexpressibly painful. In vain I remonſtrated to my father. If I had not virtue enough, he ſaid, to reſiſt, when I knew the conſequence of a ſurrender, it muſt be weak indeed: nor would he give a fig for that virtue which was not put to the proof. My education, (he would add) my pride, and the honour of my family, ought to be my ſecurity. That chaſtity which could not be preſerved without locks and bars, was not worth the expence of a key.—

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This might be true, but yet he was certainly to blame, in constantly subjecting me to the arts of the most seducing man in England. My diffidence of myself magnified the danger. I was continually upon my guard, and acted under the most disagreeable restraint. I tried to hate him; and when I could not help seeing that he was handsome,—when, in spite of myself, I found his company amusing, — I reproached myself as having already fallen from virtue.

He was continually inventing parties of pleasure, in which I was obliged to engage. My life was one perpetual scene of dissipation; I heard nothing but encomiums on
my

my beauty. No man ever better understood the art of delicate flattery than Sir George ; for most successfully had he sacrificed to the Graces.

My father has a large acquaintance. The constant gaiety that reigned at our house, rendered it a favourite resort for the *beau monde*. Our female visitors were not such as I should have chosen for my companions : though people of fashion, their morals were far from being rigid. By their witty ridicule, they so confounded virtue and vice, that I found it difficult to retain those laudable principles which had with so much pains been instilled into my youthful mind.

A life

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A life of racket never could be agreeable to one of my pensive turn: I sighed for solitude; for which you, my lively cousin, have, like the rest, often ridiculed me. I spent half my nights in reading, for which the day afforded no leisure. The authors I perused, gave me that romantic turn of which you accuse me: I fancied myself a most distressed damsel, and longed for some courteous knight to deliver me; but my ideas of that knight were so foreign to every man I beheld in real life, that I was in little danger of putting myself under any of their protections. Sir George, who studied the dispositions of those whom he wished to please, was indeed almost the sort of being I had fancied,

cied,

ced, and for that reason, was the more to be dreaded; for when conversing with him, it was impossible to believe he was the faulty character the world reported: of which, however, I was fatally convinced; fatally, I say, since his libertine attempts drove me to take the imprudent step, for which I now so severely reproach myself. — Spare me the particulars of a scene, the recollection of which fills me with terror.

While on a visit at a lady's house in the country, where Sir George also visited, he found an opportunity of being alone with me: an opportunity purposely contrived, I have reason to believe, by the vile mistress
of

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of the house.—I struggled, I screamed : no one came to my assistance : a window being open, I leaped from it, though pretty high, into the garden. Fear gave me wings : I rather flew than ran ; nor stopped till quite out of breath, and unable to proceed. I looked round, and saw, at a little distance, a pleasant little dwelling, which I reached, with some difficulty, quite exhausted with fatigue. The door was opened by a young country-looking lad, in a plain but neat livery. “ Pray let me rest myself,” faltered I, “ any - where, anywhere. O ! I am quite faint ! ” He led to the parlour : I went in : A young gentleman sat on a couch, with a book in his hand. I had not time to mark his appearance ; for I
had

had scarce proceeded three steps, ere I sunk down on the first chair, insensible. When I recovered, I found myself on the couch, and the gentleman holding a smelling-bottle in his hand ; which had contributed to restore me to life.

How shall I give you an idea of this charming youth, my dear cousin, with that expression of tender sympathy in his countenance ? how describe the harmony of his voice, when with all the softness of gentle compassion he accosted me ? Then, indeed, my romantic turn began to operate, and, with all the eloquence of a distressed damsel, I told him my sad tale, and solicited his protection, while he hung over me, enamoured.

What

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What did he not promise! and how did he vow to take vengeance on the author of my wrongs! but while he spoke, I again grew faint: I found myself extremely ill. He called a decent-looking elderly woman, who, I found, was his only female attendant: by her I was persuaded to go to bed. A fever seized me; a physician was sent for:—a whole week was I confined, unable to write, or even, being delirious, to instruct others to write to my father.

In the house of a single gentleman! no female companion! what an improper situation! I felt the whole force of it, on my recovery. What must not my character suffer from such an adventure! yet how could I
help

help being involved in it? I sent an account of the whole affair to my father, the moment I was able to hold a pen; but, alas! Sir George had been before-hand with me, and so represented his conduct, as entirely to clear himself; saying, that I had made a little innocent romping on his part, a pretence to quit the house of my friend, Mrs. Grosvenor, in order to fly to the man (for he had discovered my retreat) I had long carried on a secret correspondence with.

This was what my incensed father told me in his letter, which I received in answer to mine, and for which he reproached me in the bitterest manner; adding, that I was
now

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now at liberty to pursue what plan I thought proper, for never more should I enter his house; never more would he acknowledge me as his daughter: my character was ruined, his honour irrecoverably blasted:—He left me to my fate!

This fatal letter I read in the presence of my amiable protector: it dropped from my hand; my spirits, weakened by my illness, could not support the shock: I fainted. On my recovery, he endeavoured to soothe me, by the most tender endearments. He told me, he had taken the liberty to learn, from the letter I had dropped, the cause of my grief. He blamed my father's cruelty: "But behold in me," added he,

he, with fervour pressing my hand, "a father, a friend, a lover — and, if you will accept of me, a husband; the study of whose life shall be to render you happy. My fortune is small," continued he, "but my birth is not inferior to your's. If you can be content with this little cottage; if, on so short an acquaintance, you dare venture to unite your fate with mine, we will bid defiance to the tongue of censure, and center our felicity in each other."

Nothing could equal the graceful eloquence with which he made this generous proposal! his eyes beamed tenderness, his voice was melody, and his expressive countenance spoke
all

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all the emotions of his soul! I thanked him, in the most grateful terms, for a proposal so honourable and disinterested; but I knew not how to comply, strangers as we were to each other; I wholly unacquainted with his character, his temper, or connections:—I begged a few days to consider.

I retired to my chamber; I examined my heart; it forcibly pleaded in his favour: if I did not absolutely love, I yet felt for him a greater degree of partiality than I had ever done for any other of his sex. He was handsome, young, lively, and sensible. I had reason to judge favourably of his morals, from his conduct to me; since, exposed as
I was,

I was, and in so critical a situation, he had taken no improper advantages. Next day he renewed his suit: what could I do, my cousin? Deserted by him who ought to have been my protector, I saw no other course that I could, with prudence, pursue; I yielded then, and perhaps with less grace than he merited. I begged, however, that our marriage might, for some time, be kept private; though it appeared the first necessary step to be taken, in order to secure, or rather to vindicate, my injured fame.

I wrote to you, the moment after the awful ceremony, a letter; which you humorously ridicule, but which shewed the violent agitations of my mind.

All

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All his tender and delicate endearments could not reconcile me to myself: a clandestine marriage was what I thought I never should have been guilty of. My ever-careful and prudent mother had represented it to me as the most unpardonable crime a child could commit. Duty to parents, was what she had strongly inculcated; and she had enforced her lessons with many fatal examples of the misfortunes of those who had erred in that respect:—a just judgment, she said, for their disobedience to the authors of their being.

Mr. Sidley strove to convince me, that in my situation I could not, with propriety, have acted otherwise: that Clarissa, my favourite heroine,

heroine, who in beauty and accomplishments (he was pleased to add) I strongly resembled, had subjected herself to all the misfortunes she encountered, by being too delicate in that point; and that my father, like her's, was alone in fault. While he spoke, every care was hushed. Leaning on his arm, he led me through the charming walks that surrounded his little Eden: an elegant repast was prepared by his housekeeper, who, honest creature, seemed to partake of her master's felicity. I found she had known him from his infancy, having been his mother's favourite domestic; and warmly did she speak in his praise. In the evening, he strove to make

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me forget my situation; to make me forget what every delicate female must wish for on such an occasion, —the want of a female companion, by entertaining me on his *Viol de Gambo*; which he touched with enchanting grace, and made it yield such sounds, as must affect the most insensible: every note was love!

I have now been near a week a bride; and am preparing to pay a visit to my father, in order to attempt a reconciliation. I shall go alone. I must break the affair to him with caution. If he consents to take me home, I will stay with him, and endeavour to regain his favour, ere I introduce my amiable husband:

husband: our marriage will then have a more respectable appearance in the eyes of the world, when graced with his sanction; and till then, I wish to keep it secret.

Adieu, my dear cousin. I long, as much as you can do, to make you acquainted with my beloved.
—In all situations, I am,

Dear Clara,

Your affectionate

LOUISA SIDLEY.

LETTER III.

The same to the same.

TH.E. servants, who all love me, procured me admission to my father. With trembling steps I entered the room. I cast myself at his feet. He started up, with indignation in his countenance: "Be gone!" cried he, "leave me! How dare you venture to approach a parent so justly incensed, after a conduct so infamous?"—I was ready to faint. Tears relieved me. I could not speak. I was sinking to the earth, when some one ran and supported me. I turned, to see who it was; when, to my surprize and indignation,

dignation, I found it to be Sir George Selby ! Indignation gave me strength : I sprung from him. “ Wretch ! — are you here to add to my misery ? ” ‘ Not to add to your misery, Madam,’ returned he, with a voice softened into tenderness, ‘ but to justify you, and condemn myself !’

My father stood silent, strong marks of anger in his countenance. Sir George went up to him ; and taking his hand, ‘ My dear friend, let me intreat you to be reconciled. I cannot wholly justify my conduct to your amiable daughter. I meant not to injure her, indeed ; yet I might alarm her delicacy, by what

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most other women would have regarded as mere innocent romping.' "Innocent!" cried I, "ah, wretch!" 'I beg your pardon, Madam,' resumed he: 'I swear, I meant it as such. I have too much regard to my friend, your father ——' "No more," interrupted that father: "you are too good, Sir George: your behaviour wants no justification. Had she had that delicacy with which you politely compliment her, she would, if alarmed at your conduct, have fled to me for protection, and not have made a feigned illness a pretence. I have no patience to think of her impudence. There is but one way by which she can in the least atone for her fault: but
one

one way in which she can regain my affection; and that is, by instantly accepting the husband whom you, Sir George, have helped me to provide for her." 'I dare say,' resumed the wretch, 'Miss Palmer will have no objections: but I must beg of you not to be too precipitate. The young gentleman has many accomplishments: he is well born, a distant relation of mine, indeed, and I shall take upon myself the care of his establishment. I have a place in view for him. I look upon it as an act of justice, for having been, though innocently, the cause of making your daughter take a step which has unfortunately injured her in the eyes of a censorious world.

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Marriage is the only way to retrieve her reputation ; we may then place her elopement to that account, and the affair will blow over. — And think not, charming Louisa,' turning to me, with one of his insinuating looks, ' that we mean to sacrifice you to a man unworthy of you, in order to wipe off the stain you have cast on the honour of your family ; Mr. Palmer would at no time have objected to the alliance I propose.'

“ The alliance you propose ! ” cried I, with disdainful indignation. “ O my father,” added I, throwing myself at his feet, “ do you not see the snare that is laid for me ? Do you not see his vile intentions ? Some creature

creature of his own; some despicable wretch, who would sell his honour to gratify, to promote, the libertine projects of his infamous patron.—No, I will die ere I consent to so base, so detestable an alliance.”

‘ See, Sir,’ cried Sir George, ‘ how all my actions are misrepresented! But I have done, I will no more interfere. I acted merely from motives of justice and friendship.—Your vanity, Madam, (pardon my freedom) has found out a meaning for my conduct, which, handsome as you are, I own, I should never have dreamt of. One need not, in these days of easy virtue, be put to such

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shifts ; there are abundance of willing fair ones, if a man chuses to intrigue, without being at the pains of forming such deep-laid schemes. But I have done. Mr. Palmer will act as he thinks proper.' " That I certainly shall, Sir George ; and nothing can be more proper than the plan we had concerted.—Go, Madam," turning to me, " an apartment is provided for you ; from which you will not find it an easy matter to make a second elopement. Stay there, till you are restored to your senses ; for you shall never be released from it, till you agree to give your hand to Mr. Colvile, if, on seeing you, he will condescend to receive it. To-morrow morning
I shall

I shall introduce him. You will do well to give him a favourable reception." So saying, he called an elderly woman, who has been hired for the purpose, I suppose, since I left town. She led me, in silence, to my allotted prison:—from whence I write this.

Think, my dear cousin, what I must suffer! Think of the anxiety of my Sidley! What shall I do? How dare to reveal my marriage? and yet I must, though I have not a shadow of hope ever to be forgiven! — To be banished for ever from the presence of my father! — but there is no remedy. — Have I not a tender husband to fly to?—but

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without a farthing! His fortune small, will he not, when passion (as it too certainly will) begins to abate, repent his hasty imprudence? Will he not look upon me as a burthen? If a family should be the consequence of our union, will he be able to preserve that gentleness of temper when poverty stares us in the face? — Ah! what have I done! — 'Tis past. — O my Sidley, be but kind to me, and I will soften all your cares by my tenderness! These hands shall labour for our sustenance, if every other resource should fail. — Nothing shall appear too difficult for me, if rewarded by thy love.

Adieu, my cousin; I must give
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vent to my tears : they almost blind me.

LOUISA SIDLEY.

L E T T E R IV.

Mr. Sidley to John Summers, Esq.

YOU have at last then, my Summers, completed your tour, and return to your friends and country — to all those elegancies of life which your large fortune will procure you.

Such too were once my prospects : — but they are vanished. A
dreadful

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dreadful reverse of fortune has taken place, since we traversed together Italy's fruitful plains. My uncle, on whom all my flattering hopes depended—who had, with fond indulgence, bred me as the heir to his vast wealth—in a fit of dotage, took to himself a wife, and, forgetting all his promises to me, made his will in her favour. He did not long survive this imprudent step. He died, and left her all:—by which I was reduced to the small patrimony of a younger brother; a little estate, about three hundred a year: to which, disgusted with the world, because its joys were out of my reach, I retired; hoping to find some sober felicity in the cultivation
of

of my farm, and the study of those ancients, who, from more laudable motives, had spent their lives in rural shades and philosophic ease.

But at my age, with all my passions tremblingly alive, when the soul pants for pleasure, how ill was I fitted for inactive retirement! The sameness of a country-life soon began to pall: I sighed to revisit the chearful haunts of man; and after having been buried for a few months amidst rustics, who have not a single idea beyond the knowledge of when it is proper to sow, to reap, and gather into their barns, I had determined to sell my little estate, and not to beat my sword into

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into a plough-share, but to convert my plough-share into a sword, and go into the army. All the military ardour seized me. The fatal American war roused me from my inactivity, and called me to arms. But behold! just as I was settling this noble plan, Mars, who feared, no doubt, to be rivalled by my mighty prowess, spitefully sent his friend Venus to visit my cottage. She had artfully veiled her divinity, without obscuring her beauty, under the form of a mortal,—the most lovely of all mortals—Miss Palmer!—She came, she saw, and conquered. Farewel to arms, to glory, and to fame! Instead of being a conqueror, I became a willing slave; and that for life.

life. Yes, Summers, I have played the fool, and married! So Prudence says. Yet so sweet is the passion, that I fancy it will be some months at least, ere I am so far restored to my sober senses as to be able to look forward to the consequences.

When my Louisa is with me, the late stupid country appears a perfect Eden! Will the scene change? That admits a doubt. From the little I know of myself—and I have had leisure, and taken some pains in that difficult study—I fear there is a sort of restless inconstancy in my disposition. A good, a moral education, has hitherto preserved me from any violent deviations from the

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the rule of right. But I have strong passions, and a vivacity which will not suffer me to be long content with dull uniformity. I believe, I ought not to have married so young. Youth is the season for freedom. But the affair required dispatch. I trusted to my skill in physiognomy to develope the character of my fair one. I saw she was young, lovely, and artless in her manner: her voice was harmony; and her sense refined. In short, I will love her as long as I can; and when passion ceases, she shall, if she merits it, ever possess my esteem; and at any rate, that polite respect to which every female is entitled, who takes
virtue

virtue for her guide. — So ends the chapter.

Adieu. I expect a visit from you at Belmont. I will not do you the injustice to suppose, that change of fortune can have diminished your friendship, or that you will regard me as an inferior, because my purse is lighter than thine. Man to man, all outward distinctions are foreign. You shall see a cottage neat and convenient; books well-chosen for your retired hours; plain wholesome food; wines that Bacchus himself might quaff; walks in which a weed dares not raise its disorderly head; and a mistress of that dwelling, whom the best artists that Rome

ever

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ever could boast, might be proud to copy. Adieu.

I am, with true regard,

Your humble servant,

CHARLES SIDLEY.

LETTER V.

Mrs. Sidley to Miss Hastings.

THIS morning the horrid wretch to whom my unkind father would sacrifice me, was introduced. You never, my cousin, beheld such an object. A long, lean, awkward creature, in a tawdry suit of ill-chosen fine cloaths! at least, they

they appeared so on the wearer ; who seemed to feel the weight of trappings, to which he had not been accustomed. He repeated, with an air of ill-bred embarrassment, a speech which was visibly not the production of his own stupid brain. —I shall not trouble you with a conversation which, had I not been too nearly concerned in it, would have highly diverted me. You may suppose I gave him, without the least ceremony, his *congé d' aller*. The creature, who had been taught to expect this, was also taught to look sorrowful upon the occasion. He accordingly screwed up his unmeaning features in, so grotesque a style, that mine, in spite of the reason

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son I had to be grave, could not stand it—I burst into a laugh. At the same moment, my incensed father, who had so placed himself as to overhear all our curious dialogue, burst into the room. A storm ensued. I was first threatened, then attempted to be soothed. All in vain:—I continued fixed, as you may suppose, in my obstinate rejection of a fellow, who, had I been free, must have met with the same treatment. They retired at last, to concert new measures to torment me, and left me confined to my apartment.

You will, no doubt, wonder, my dear Clara, at my father's strange conduct;

conduct; but I have since been let into the fatal cause :—My mother's maid, who, ever since her death, has acted as our housekeeper, gained admission to me. The good creature was extremely affected at my situation, and the still more disagreeable prospects that awaited me from my father's imprudence: with reluctance she informed me that he had, for some time past, formed an attachment with a woman, whose extravagance had thrown his affairs into the utmost confusion; that Sir George had discovered this secret; and hinting it to my father, without condemning what he himself countenanced by his example, had, with well-feigned friendship, advanced him

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him a considerable sum on his bond, and also promised his interest to procure him some lucrative post under the government; by which my infatuated father had put himself so much into his power, that he was wholly governed by his advice. Benet had discovered all this, by being accidentally in a closet adjoining to the room where the affair of the bond was transacted. They next talked on the subject of my elopement. He advised my father to send for me home, as I had, in the letter I wrote during my illness, told him where I was: and then the scheme of my marriage was also concerted. My father, willing to get rid of me on any terms, listened eagerly to his proposal.

propofal. The very next day, without his having the trouble of fending for me, I returned. And now, my coufin, as I find how matters are, I fhall make no fcruple to reveal my marriage, fince all my father wifhes is to get me out of the way, that he may bring home his infamous favourite. How do I lament his folly! But what would my remonftrance avail? Time only can fhew him the fatal confequences of his error. — I in hafte fcribbled a few lines for my Sidley, which I gave Benet the charge of; and now I will defire a conference with my father, and inform him of my fituation: he cannot be more exafperated than he already is. Alas! en-

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tangled as he is, in a criminal connection, I can no longer hope for his protection. Vice has hardened his heart, and must stifle the voice of nature, and destroy all the finer feelings of the soul! — O my ever-respected mother, who breathed thy last sigh with such pious resignation, how, couldst thou have foreseen the fate of thy beloved daughter, would thy dying moments have been im-bittered! But I rejoice that thou didst not!

Adieu, dear cousin: I must collect my fortitude for the expected conference.

Your's, &c.

LOUISA SIDLEY.

LETTER VI.

Sir George Selby to Richard Savage, Esq.

ALL my projects are disconcerted! the best-concerted plot I ever formed! The father wholly in my power, effectually entangled by the artful Saunders, who has played her part to a miracle! But what does all this avail? the girl is married, Dick! absolutely married! and that to a fellow of spirit, whom nature does not seem to have cut out to wear the honourable badge of a modern husband.—

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And

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And yet, by Heaven! she must be mine.

There is but one way, and that is a desperate resource, though I have seldom been foiled; and often have I had occasion to exercise my skill upon impertinent brothers and lovers, who have dared to intermeddle in my affairs of gallantry. I will demand satisfaction of this Sidley, for seducing the daughter of my friend. I will not credit the report of their marriage: I will not suffer the father to give credit to it. — He shall fight me. I will kindle a flame of jealousy in his breast; a separation will most probably ensue, if not more fatal consequences.

I must

I must possess her, or perish in the attempt. Almost from infancy I have marked her as my own. I love her even to madness. — This moment will I dispatch a challenge. Life is not life without my Louisa! If I had not been fettered by a cursed marriage, I would even have paid the price of my freedom to have become the master of her charms. — My long-rooted passion for her, is become a part of my being.

Adieu. — Something must be done, and that instantly, or I lose her for ever.

Your's, &c.

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LETTER VII.

Mrs. Sidley to Miss Hastings.

O Clara!—My husband, my lover, my Sidley!—That abandoned libertine!—He is wounded! desperately wounded!—he refuses to see me!—I rushed into his apartment in an agony not to be described. — Indignation was painted in his pale countenance!—he ordered me to be gone!—I cast myself on my knees, — I bathed his dear face with my tears!—He made his attendants force me from him!—they refuse me admittance!—My husband dying! I banished from
his

his presence! what will become of me? I am almost distracted! — I watch at the door of his apartment, I hear his groans! at this moment I hear them!

IN CONTINUATION.

A letter — for my Sidley! — Ah! from the vile Sir George! — I must read it.

THE CONTENTS.

“ I have injured you, Sir. — I have compelled you to an action, which, I fear, will prove fatal to both. — My wound is pronounced incurable. The approach of death

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has restored me to reason.—I acquit you, Sir; and so will the law, if the circumstances are fairly represented. But I must yet do more:—Your charming wife is innocent.—Long have I loved her with a criminal passion. She ever repulsed me, with the most unconquerable virtue.—I die, to atone for my fault.—May you live, and be happy as such a woman can make you! She deserves all your confidence and love.

GEORGE SELBY."

What consolation is this, my Clara! — My dear husband will be reconciled! he will do me justice. I fly to him.—Adieu.

Your's, &c.

LOUISA SIDLEY.

L E T T E R VIII.

Miss Hastings to Mrs. Sidley.

WHAT new misfortune has happened to you, my Louisa? Three weeks are elapsed, and not one single line! How cruel is this suspense! Surely, your Sidley is not dead! Heaven forbid! — Write to me immediately.

I shall say nothing of my own affairs. — I wait, with trembling impatience, for the conclusion of your Novel. O let it end fortunately! Spare my tears: weeping is not to my taste. I would hope the best.

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If your good man is recovered, you will then glide on in all the comfortable calmness of still-life; breeding, nursing, and all the stupid *et cætera's* of a marriage, such as you have chosen, where fortune is wanting to enjoy the dear delights of the *ton*. — Adieu. I hope, I shall have more grace than to follow your sober example.

The joys of wedlock with the cares I'll mix :
'Tis best repenting in a coach and fix.

If you are in grief, this levity is inexcusable; but I have a *pressenti-ment* to the contrary: and, after all, I never was born to figure in the plaintive style; though, be assured,

no

no one loves you more sincerely
than

Your

CLARA HASTINGS.

L E T T E R IX.

Mrs. Sidley to Miss Hastings.

YES, Clara, my Novel, according to your ideas, is finished; and that as you could wish: — My Sidley's life is out of danger—Sir George's letter had the desired effect. But how could I write, my cousin, while there was the least doubt of his recovery? how leave him for a
D 6 moment?

60 THE RELAPSE,

moment? My attendance was unremitted. How amply was I repaid by his tenderness! I was insensible of the fatigue, though for more than a fortnight I sat up by his bed-side, and hardly for an instant closed my eyes. All, I hope, will now be well.

Sir George, contrary to every one's expectations, lives also: his wound is cured, though it has left him extremely weak. A consumption was apprehended; for which, by the advice of his physicians, he is gone to the south of France: a fortunate circumstance for me, as his penitence might have worn off on his recovery, and I might again have

have been entangled in his snares. To do him justice, he has, as far as it was in his power, atoned for his offence ; since he has not only justified me to my Sidley, but broke, by exposing the vile character of the woman, my father's unfortunate connection with that creature Saunders ; and, generously enough, has likewise cancelled the bond. Still, however, his affairs are greatly *dérangé* : but he is now calling in his debts, and intends, with the little remains of his fortune, to retire into the country. We have been enquiring for a house in our neighbourhood, a small estate indeed ; which, we hope, he will yet be able to purchase. How happy will it be
for

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for me to have him so near us ! Then indeed, my cousin, will my life glide on in what you call stupid Serenity ; but what I more justly call enviable Felicity ; my care and attention divided between a husband, whom I adore, and a father, whom, for the future, I trust, I shall have as much reason to respect as love.

I ever was romantically fond of the country, you know : and here, three hundred a year is sufficient to supply our every want, nay, to supply us with all the little elegancies which a reasonable being can desire, though not the expensive luxury which fashion, vanity, and caprice require. Our little garden
not

not only blooms fair to the eye, but contains the most delicate food for our table, in the vegetable way ; our poultry is exquisite ; our orchard is loaden with fruit.

My Sidley is a florist : — 'tis a pleasing amusement, when not carried to excess ; when a tulip is not made an idol. He will be my guide, philosopher, and friend. His *parterre*, his books, and his music, will find him sufficient employment ; nor, I may hope, will conversing with me, and strolling with me through his pleasing domains, be the least of his pleasures. Of such pleasures I should never tire : but men in general are more inconstant

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stant in their nature than our sex ; or perhaps, it is more from education than nature, that an uniform life is more to our taste, from infancy constrained, born to subjection.

As far as I can judge of my Sidley's disposition, he is lively, good-humoured, but rather hasty ; subject to starts of passion, but soon cool again ; delicate in his sentiments, and particularly refined in his ideas of the woman who would hope to insure his affections. The greatest propriety in dress and manner is required ; the most gentle submission to his will — which, however, I hope and believe, will never be unreasonable, or hardly arbitrary.

And

And yet, if I am not mistaken, he will require a variety in her temper, to keep his attention alive.

I have an arduous task before me ; for should I perceive (what yet I fear must happen) a diminution of his regard, I shall be wretched. I do not, however, romantic as you esteem me, expect his passion to continue equally fervent ; but a tender friendship, a fixed esteem, and a constant preference for me, before any other of my sex, I must at least fancy he has, in order to render me happy. I cannot desire him, or suppose he will be blind to the charms of other women : I will permit him to see and admire ; but still I would
wish

66 THE RELAPSE,

wish him to be able to say to himself, "These are beautiful objects, but they do not affect me: my Lucia alone awakens my sensibility:

The more I behold her, the more I approve
The choice I have made; and am fix'd in
my love."

Or if his wishes, by a too tempting object, should stray from me for a few moments, his better judgment should bring him back again; convinced that I alone can constitute his felicity.

I fear, my dear cousin, I have a little tincture of jealousy in my composition. Fatal passion! which often makes the food it feeds on! I must
guard

guard against it. But can a delicate love subsist without it? The fears of losing the object of our choice, makes us exert all our attractions to secure it; while security breeds negligence,—and that negligence is the bane of matrimony. Some ladies may think, the unlimited confidence a husband places in them, is a compliment to their virtue; but I rather think it is, in most instances, a mark of indifference: they set so little value on their charms, that they fancy other men will be equally insensible to them. I would have my Sidley delicately tenacious of mine. I would wish to see him ever displaying that polite assiduity, that
desire

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desire to please, which will entitle him to my undivided heart.

You will call me romantic again, and laugh at my visionary ideas of matrimony:— Ah! that state to me must either be exquisitely happy or miserable; which will be the fate of your Louisa, time will shew.

Adieu, my dear Clara.— Write now, without restraint, and give your lively humour free scope; for even your levity is amusing to

Your true friend,

LOUISA SIDLEY.

LETTER

LETTER X.

Miss Hastings to Mrs. Sidley.

O Dear! O dear! what charming ideas of fancied bliss! How long, I wonder, will your fairy dream continue? It is a happy thing to see objects in their true light! they are not so brilliant indeed; but one is not so liable to be disgusted by disappointment. Give me the permanent joys of life — in youth, gaiety and admiration, in age, that splendid fortune which shall secure respect and excite envy! My soul is formed for ambition;

Love's

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Love's a trifling, childish passion,
Only fit for girls and boys.

Nay, were I even to be infected by it, I swear, I could never submit to be undeified, by marrying the man of whom I had the weakness to be fond. Matrimony is the grave of love. How would it wound my pride, to watch the gradual decrease of my power ! No ; I would chuse for my husband the man who adored me, and whom I could esteem ; but without a grain of passion : then he would continue to adore, because he would never arrive at the summit of his wishes,—the inspiring me with sensibility. There would be something still to wish and to enjoy. Self-denial is
the

the greatest epicurism. We exhaust life, by leaving ourselves nothing to hope for.

To shew you that I act up to my principles, I must tell you, that I have at this instant two admirers, candidates for the honour of my fair hand: about the choice of whom, your romantic lovesome damsels would not require a moment's pause. The one young, and handsome as an Adonis; the other old, but rich as Cræsus. The first sensible, accomplished, tender, passionate, and engaging; the last stiff, formal, and with all the peculiarities of an old batchelor. The love of the one, all delicate and sentimental; that of the other, surfeit-
ingly

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ingly fond, but without the least embellishment. My heart, would I listen to its dictates, pleads for the first : it tells me, he is rich enough to afford me all the necessaries of life, of a country life, like your's, my cousin. I yawn at the bare idea : —a one-horse chaise, peradventure, or a soft pillion behind Scrub, our lank-hair'd and only domestic, to hobble to church on ; a gloomy wainscot parlour, the windows overgrown with woodbines, to receive the visits of our country neighbours in ; pigs and poultry in abundance. —Horrid !

But my dear Sir Benjamin (a title in the first place, you find!) will keep
me

me a post-coach and four; has a noble seat for a few summer months residence; and for the winter (how my heart bounds at the idea!) a house in London, not yet taken indeed; nor is a journey to that dear scene of joys as yet any part of his plan; but what of that? shall I not reign with unlimited power?

My other inamorato would fancy, that we are never to be weary of telling each other our passion beneath the green shade. He would expect me to enter into all his æconomical plans.—A journey to London! Heavens! to what purpose, when people are so wonderfully comfortable in the country? be-

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sides, how is it to be done? or, should he even stretch a point, on what footing must I appear there? — a lodging, — a couple of servants, — a hack to Ranelagh, *tête-à-tête* with my good man, to stare at the fine folks, — to be squeezed to death with my landlady, as a *chaperone* of our party, in order to see a play, — a boat to the Tower, to gape at the lions, — a stroll in the park, without a single hat or curtsy to cheer one; — the fine fellows, who, if I had appeared with proper *eclat*, would be dying to pay their *devoirs* to me, then staring at me with insolent freedom, take a pinch of snuff, and, turning on their heel, exclaim, A passable figure; Who is she, I wonder? Nobody
of

of consequence ; and fine gentlemen, whose passions are satiated by variety, chuse their mistresses as they do their cloaths, — for their being fashionable ! Horrid ! What is London without being able to live in the *ton* ? — No more of the gentle Mr. Eveling then, Sir Benjamin's the man for my money. — O what pleasures will abound !

Adieu ; for I hear he is below. Now, Sir Knight, plead thy suit, nor fear success. — Lie still, my heart, nor dare to murmur thy repugnance.

I am, my dear, sober, domestic, romantic, matrimonized cousin,

Ever your's,

CLARA HASTINGS.

LETTER XI.

John Summers, Esq; to Mr. Sidley.

YOU do me no more than justice, my dear Sidley, in supposing that your reverse of fortune will not lessen my friendship for you. No, on my soul, I long as much at this moment to embrace you, as when, delivered by your valour, I pressed to my heart my generous second in the unequal fight; nor shall I think you less worthy of respect in your small cottage, than when in your Roman palace. But you must give me leave to vent a few curses on the memory of that
infatuated

infatuated old man, who, after giving you a taste of life's highest luxuries, blasted your fair hopes, for that rattle in his second childhood, a woman ! "

And now I talk of woman, you too, I fear, my friend, have been too precipitate in giving up your freedom :—not that I doubt the beauty, virtue, and all that, of your fair *cara sposa* ; but you have, from your education, acquired that taste for elegant pleasures, without which life will soon become insipid to you. Love, at present, will fill up every void ; but love, alas ! is the most transient of all our passions : — a passion for one object, I mean. — A taste for

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hounds, for horses, pictures, statues, butterflies, may last for life; but that taste is not gratified without a continual addition to the collection: so a taste for woman may last till our lives end; but then the taste will be progressive, and cannot be confined to one. You have sacrificed all the prospects of advancing your fortune, for the sake of a wife, who had only a large stock of beauty. — A fellow of your appearance and accomplishments, might have picked and chosen amongst the whole sex.

You have disconcerted a plan I had projected in your favour, and which your uncle's caprice should
not

not have rendered abortive. It is almost needless to mention it now:—but, from my first acquaintance with you, I had marked you out for each other; for my sister ward, Lady Isabella Conway, I mean;—as fine a girl as any in England; an orphan of large fortune.—On no man on earth could she have bestowed it better than on my Sidley.

“What have you brought me?” cried she, in her lively way, on my first visit to her after my return: “you promised me some foreign curiosities; some antiquities from Rome; some perfumes from Italy; a cap from France; and some other trifle,—I forget what:—O! a husband,

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band, I think it was ! Come, where are my presents ? the man ! I long to see the man ! here we have nothing but monkies : your friend, as you have described him, must be a kind of novelty to me.”—In spite of the lively airs she assumed, I could perceive she was not a little chagrined, when I informed her, that you had taken the liberty to dispose of yourself without my consent. I had, in my letters to her, spoke so highly, and so justly, in your praise, that she was visibly prepossessed in your favour. She paused a few moments ; then asked, with a pettish air, if your lady was so very handsome ? “ Exquisitely beautiful,” returned I. ‘ Really ! no wonder he

was

was in such a hurry, then, to dispose of himself'—(rising, and looking in the glass.)—‘Is she a fair beauty?—I think the expressive countenance of a *brunette*——’ “O Bell!” cried I, laughing, “you are a mere woman, I find; but I cannot gratify either your vanity or curiosity, for I never saw Mrs. Sidley.” ‘Vanity, indeed!’ disdainfully, ‘I should not have thought of that! I dare say, I am at least equal——’ She stopped, and bridled her pretty head: I never saw her look so handsome.

But what is all this to you, Benedict, the married man? I ought rather to apologize for not having accepted your obliging invitation. But

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at this season of the year, when the town is still full of company, there is no disentangling one's self from a thousand frivolous engagements, which one is almost irresistibly drawn into. My long absence from England, too, makes me have a number of family-visits to pay, the omission of which would draw on me the displeasure of half an hundred old dowagers, whose good graces it is my interest to retain.

Suppose then, instead of my paying my devoirs to you at Belmont, you were to favour me with your company in Grosvenor Square; and not you only, but your beloved. My house is large enough; and I should
be

be happy to introduce her to the ladies of my family; and you, my Sidley, to those joys which society can yield, and which you are so well qualified to partake and enhance. We will have one house, one purse, one heart: your wife alone shall be wholly appropriated to your use. I foresee a thousand pleasures from the scheme: and after the bustle of the *beau monde*, you will return with double relish (when the weather is more inviting) to your embowering shades: at present, I think, it is rather too cold for rural felicity. — If Mrs. Sidley will not honour us with her company, let me at least enjoy that of my friend; and tell her, that short absence argues sweet return.

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Adieu. — Be assured, that you have not on earth a friend who more truly values you, than

Your humble servant,

JOHN SUMMERS.

LETTER

LETTER XII.

Mrs. Sidley to Miss Hastings.

I Never was so diffident as I feel myself at this moment, in regard to giving my advice on the subject of matrimony. A few days ago, had I received your last letter, I should not have hesitated an instant to condemn your conduct, in stifling the dictates of your heart, and in proposing to sacrifice its tender feeling to your ambition. But, alas! can even love render us completely happy in this imperfect state?

I am

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I am low-spirited. Why do we vainly flatter ourselves with permanent felicity? it is what we ought not to hope for. — My Sidley has, for this week past, appeared gloomy and reserved. O Heaven! has he a care, of which I have not a right to partake? Does he repent his (as he now, I fear, deems it) hasty and imprudent choice? — With the gentlest submission, I have entreated him to inform me of the cause of his sadness: he answers me peevishly; he leaves me abruptly. I ask him to read to me, as usual, while I work: — he is hoarse; he has not leisure! I beg of him to play my favourite air: — the instrument is out of tune. The evening is delightful; will

will not my Sidley accompany me in a walk ?—he takes his hat, with a careless air ; I put my arm through his, I smile in his dear face, I endeavour to amuse him with my prattle : he appears absent, suffers me to lead him where I please ; but no longer entertains me with his pleasing remarks on the beauties that surround us ; my hand is no longer pressed in his ; he seems not to know that I am by his side ! This morning, as we strolled, he started from me, folded his arms, and walked several paces, as not knowing what he did ; so deeply was he buried in thought ! I burst into tears : — it was wrong, but I could not help it for my life. He turned round, with an air
of

86 THE RELAPSE,

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of

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of displeasure, "Louisa, is it thus you endeavour to raise my spirits? A vapourish wife is detestable." "My dear Sir, pardon me; I caught the infection from you." "From me!—why, do you expect me to be always in the same humour? do you expect me to be for ever in raptures with objects which I behold every moment? every prospect, every walk is become familiar." "And does familiarity breed disgust?" returned I, smiling; "what, in that case, will become of your poor Louisa?" "You are not an inanimate object," answered he; "I expect to find variety in your charms. No one is better qualified to secure the heart you have gained than yourself, if
you

you will be at the pains : but I must not be suspected ; I must not be teased with frivolous questions.—When you see me grave, ask not the cause, but endeavour to amuse me. You may believe, I have too much friendship, too much confidence in you, to conceal any thing material from you ; but one is sometimes gloomy, without being well able to account for it even to one's self ; and at such a time, you will act prudently to let it pass off unnoticed, or by artfully engaging one in some little scheme of amusement, it will wear off of itself.—The pleasures of the country are rather too uniform for my taste.” He stifled a sigh. ‘ I am sorry for it, my dear Sidley : they have to me
every

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every day new charms.' "Our tastes differ, Madam," coolly. 'I am sorry for it, my dear; but when the pleasures of the town are out of our reach, it is best to be content.' "True, Madam: contentment is a mighty sober virtue." 'O! call me not Madam, my beloved Sidley; I can be content with every thing but that: it is too soon for so very cool an expression, — only three months married!' "Love and Dear, Louisa, are such hacknied terms; often uttered without meaning." 'But Madam, my Sidley, I fear, seldom is without a meaning which I should be sorry to attribute to the expression when uttered by you.' "But three months married, did you say,
my

my dear," smiling as he spoke: "on my word, we come on finely! our dialogue favours as much of matrimony, as if we had been married this twelvemonth." "Too much so indeed, my Sidley; let us put an end to it. I have not paid a visit to my father this morning; will you accompany me?" "No, my love," pressing my hand tenderly enough, "I have some business:—I will meet you on your return."

On my return, I passed through a little wood, at some distance from our house. There I beheld my beloved stretched on the ground, beneath some spreading trees: he had dropped asleep, with a book in his hand.

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hand. I did not wonder at his slumber, as he had passed a very restless night. — How charming did he appear ! — I approached him as gently as I could, for fear of disturbing him. I seated myself by his side. He had been studying one of my favourite authors, Lucas's Enquiry after Happiness. — Ah, my Sidley, are you already at a loss where to find it ? The happiness of your Louisa is centered in thee.

I took up the book, intending to amuse myself with it till he awoke. He had put a letter in the place where he left off. — A letter in a man's hand, why did it excite my curiosity ? yet I longed exceedingly
to

to read it. I turned it round and round, but durst not indulge myself: it was contrary to my rule of conduct, it was contrary to my duty; and yet, I know not why, I attributed to it the cause of his chagrin. — I was going, though I own with reluctance, to replace it, when he suddenly started from his, perhaps, feigned slumber. — Never did any one make so guilty a figure as your poor Louisa! He looked sternly at me! “Well, Madam, have you satisfied your feminality? Have you discovered my intrigue?” ‘Dear Sir,’ trembling, ‘how can you suspect? On my honour, I have not read one single line; nor would for the world, without your consent.’ “You did

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well, Louisa; and I can believe you, because I have observed you the whole time: but confess, I awoke very *a-propos*." 'Indeed, Sir, I could not have been guilty.' "O to be sure!" ironically. "But I have no secrets, child:—that letter is only from a male friend; and, since you have seen it, I will tell you part of its contents: it is an invitation for us to spend some time in town — What say you to a London jaunt?' 'Dear Sir, you know I prefer the country. The expence,—a thousand reasons, render such a scheme imprudent.' "O, as to the expence," returned he, "as we shall live with my friend, that will be trifling!" 'Your friend, I suppose, my dear,'
said

said I, 'is a man of fashion and fortune?' "He is so, Louisa." 'Then to make a proper appearance, my dear, will not be such an easy matter — Dress, public places. — Your spirit will not, I know, submit to any pecuniary obligations.' "I believe you are right, my dear; and yet this country life has so much insipid sameness! — To tell you the truth, this letter has been the cause of some uneasiness — I long to see my friend, but cannot bear the thoughts of leaving my love;" [This was kind: — the tear of sensibility started into my eye.] "and to take you with me," continued he, "is attended with a thousand inconveniences." 'Then go alone, my Sidley,'

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ley,' cried I, eagerly; 'Heaven forbid, that your Louisa should be a bar to your pleasures: the care of our little family-concerns, and attention to my father, will find me sufficient employment in your absence. — You will write to me, you will describe the gay scenes in which you engage, and thus your Louisa will partake of your pleasures.—You are formed for society; I dare not, cannot hope to engross you all to myself.' Then, taking his hand, I sung in a plaintive voice:

‘ At setting day and rising morn,
With soul that still shall love thee,
I'll ask of Heaven thy safe return,
With all that can improve thee.’

He

He folded me in his arms.
 "Sweet girl! enchanting Louisa!
 how shall I be able to leave you?
 This disinterested proof of your confidence, of your regard for me, has a thousand times more than ever endeared you to me. Had you pouted, had you played the wife, I should have left you without regret; but your gentle softness—I will not, cannot go. You have again re-animated the face of nature! We rove in vain in search of pleasure; with such a companion as you, we can best find it at home." So saying, he folded my willing arm in his, and strolled towards the house, saying to me, as we walked, every

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thing

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thing that a tender passion could dictate.

This goodness has but the more determined me to urge his departure. I see, alas! too plain, that his heart is set on it, though he endeavours to stifle and conquer its weakness. Alas! I foresee much inquietude to myself from this journey. [He will, I fear, acquire such a relish for the expensive pleasures of the town, that the peaceful country will appear doubly disgusting. He has a natural taste for dissipation: it is indeed the taste of youth. I, perhaps, should still have retained it, had I not enjoyed all its vain delights, even to satiety. — He will
go,

go, I make no doubt, and I must endeavour to reconcile myself to the painful thoughts of his departure.

I wish he would shew me the fatal letter that has thus unhinged us: I could then be able to form some idea of the character of his friend.—Evil communication, says the proverb, corrupts good manners.—Heaven guard and protect my Sidley!

I am, dear cousin, most sincerely,

Your's,

LOUISA SIDLEY.

LETTER XIII.

Miss Hastings to Mrs. Sidley.

YOUR own affairs, dear cousin, so much engross you, that my important concerns can but little affect. I do not expect they should, since the receipt of your last letter: before that, I had set you down as a peaceful country wife, whose life would glide serenely on, without either care or pleasure; but, if I am not mistaken, you will, by the lively genius of your good man, find sufficient variety to keep you awake.

I never

I never had any violent opinion of your love-marriages, my dear; and so I have often told you: I thought, however, if any mortal woman was formed to secure the heart of that volatile creature Man, you was the person: — with beauty superior to most of our sex; with a fine cultivated understanding; with great sweetness of temper, yet sufficiently lively; and with all the graces of a polite education: I may add too, with a wonderful stock of prudence; — but in this last instance, you certainly did not give any violent proof of it. — It was mighty pretty, tender, and all that, to encourage your good man in his frolic; but you do not seem to con-

sider the consequence of such an indulgence. Had I been in your place, I should certainly have accompanied him, merely for the pleasure of the jaunt. You ought to have done the same, though from more laudable motives. Trust me, child, nothing so weakens a matrimonial union, as separation. A very short absence between lovers, indeed, sometimes increases affection, because, according to my favourite doctrine, there is something still left to wish and to enjoy; but after marriage, those whom Heaven has joined should never be asunder. The man beholds a thousand new objects, and, merely because they are new, every one of them more
attractive

attractive, than his wife:—he sees them only when they are adorned for conquest, and he seeks them only when he is in a humour to be pleased. A wife he beholds at all hours, and in all dresses; she is more attentive to be useful than amusing: but abroad, he is not admitted behind the scenes; every thing that is exhibited to company is chearful, elegant, and amusing: he forgets his deary at home, and, when compelled to return to her, he sighs after the gay society he has quitted, and finds nothing but languor and insipidity. In a more advanced age, indeed, reason will predominate, and give a relish to the serene pleasures of a domestic life;

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but in youth, passion is too predominant to be satisfied with such languid enjoyments. — In short, my Louisa, I fear you have suffered your Sidley to take a very imprudent step, independent of the expence; which, however, with your circumscribed fortune, may have very serious consequences. Heaven grant my fears may be groundless! — At all events, keep up with him a regular correspondence; and, if you do not esteem it a breach of your matrimonial duty, transmit me his letters; I am unprejudiced, and a stander-by sees most of the game. Soon shall I (though love may blind your fair eyes) be able to judge by them the state of his heart. If I find

find any declension, I shall send you off post haste, in search of your rover: — we must shoot flying, if we perceive him on the wing. Perhaps it may not be long ere I shall, in person, have an opportunity of watching his motions; for, to tell you the truth, I have half fixed the happy day that is to unite my fate with that of my antiquated inamorato. How delighted the good soul is! Ah, he little foresees what a dance I shall lead him!—No lectures, cousin — you are not quite so romantic as you was a few months ago: All for Love, or the World well Lost, is not quite so much in favour.—No sober tragedies for me:

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give me a lively comedy for my play of life.

I gave you in my last only a slight sketch of my swains; I had not leisure to be particular. I believe I did not inform you that Mr. Eveling is nephew, by the mother's side, to my dear Sir Benjamin. I shot them both with one dart at our last affize ball. The only thing I regret is, that by my marrying the last, I destroy the prospects of the former, who expected to heir the large estate of his uncle: but what dependence could he have on a hale old batchelor, who has a hundred times before been inclined to play the fool? Why not wed me as well

as

as another? Nay, I will be a more generous aunt than he imagines; for, as I hope I shall have no children, the estate shall still be his, only incumbered with my jointure. —I will do more:—Since the affair of children is not certain, I shall get him to settle something handsome on him before our engagement. It is a proposal which I have already made; nor will I give up the point, till it is accomplished. Justice seems to demand this.—A few hundreds a year is a trifle to him, who is immensely rich.

I esteem Mr. Eveling more than any man I know:—I even admire him. This very morning he sof-

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tened me to a degree, by his persuasive eloquence. But I will never more trust myself with such a *tête-à-tête*. Love is very amusing, and all that, but I know myself too well, to think I could ever be happy, at least for any time, without the elegant joys of life, which fortune only can purchase ;—so, dear insinuating Eveling, you must go abroad, if nothing but my hand can induce you to remain in your native country : it will, I fancy, be best for us both : — gaiety and splendor will soon drive thee from my memory ; and absence, I doubt not, will on thee produce the same effect.

He has a fine manly voice. No-
thing

thing could be more pathetic, than while, holding my hand, he sung a few lines from Thomson :

For ever, Fortune, wilt thou prove
An unrelenting foe to Love ;
And when we meet a mutual heart,
Come in between, and bid us part ?

The tear glistened in his eye while he spoke : — mine, I fear, was not quite free from moisture ; but I turned it off with an air of levity. “ A mutual heart, friend ! ” cried I, pushing him from me : “ upon my word, very free language to your aunt ! ” “ My aunt ! — Curse on the fatal word ! — O Clara ! — ” “ Don’t be silly, Eveling ; you know I detest your O’s and Ah’s. — The affair is determined.

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determined. Marriage, and something else, you know, go by destiny:—who can resist their fate? My dear Sir Benjamin's and mine have long been strung up together in the courts above." "O madam! how can you thus sport with my misery?" "O! again, Sir," smiling; "but were I to treat the affair as seriously as your Worship, we should make a sad piece of work of it: and I hate sadness.

Since life is no more than a passage at best,
Let's strew the way over with flowers.

I refuse you as much for your sake
as my own:—I should make a horrid wife for a poor man: no æconomical

nomical talents in the world! Love, we know, would not (be as careful of the commodity as we could) last above the first month, or two at most; and then what a frightful void! no pleasures in our power, to fill up the dreadful chasm." "No pleasures! how can my Clara think so? The Loves and Graces would for ever make their abode in our elegant cottage:—every amusement that the country can yield!" "The country!—Horrid!—Sauntering, dozing over a book, yawning at what is called the conversation of the rustics of our neighbourhood, or yawning by ourselves, for want of something to say; each day repeating over and over the same dull scene

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scene we trod before:—mere vegetation! I should die in a twelvemonth, of downright *ennui*.”

The *à-propos* entrance of Sir Benjamin put a stop to our conversation. He is not quite pleased at his nephew's visits to me; but I dispelled the cloud on his brow, by telling him, Mr. Eveling was come to bid me adieu, being determined to set off for France in a few days. “It is a good scheme,” cried the old man; “living is much cheaper there; and his prudent father effectually saved him from being extravagant, by leaving him nothing to spend.” “No reflections on my father, Sir Benjamin, I beseech you: every

every man has a right to dispose of his fortune as he pleases.' " True, true, nephew : I meant no reproach to you ; I have ever found you a good young man." ' Prove your regard for him then, Sir,' cried I, ' and render his circumstances more easy.' " Why are you so much interested, Madam? you speak warmly"—and the old soul looked arch. ' It is no more than justice, Sir, to so near a relation.' I believe, I coloured a little at his archness. " Justice, Madam ! I will do ample justice to your beauty :—and one act of justice, let me tell you, is as much as can be expected from one man, as the world goes." ' Do justice to yourself, Sir,' resumed I, ' by giving
way

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way to your natural generosity : it will be an action worthy of you.' " I will consider of it, nephew," said Sir Benjamin : " come to me this evening." The graceful youth bowed, sighed, and departed, darting a glance at me ; which expressed more than words could utter.

My father is quite delighted with the prudent choice I have made : — he takes all the merit of it, and piques himself on his plan of education ; which has rendered me so superior, as he says, to the weakness of my sex, the love-sick whining toads, as he calls them. He generally ends with his favourite song :

Wincing

Wincing and whining,
 Sighing and pining !
 Thank Heaven, I'm not plagu'd
 With an obstinate daughter !

My aunt is as busy as a bee, in making preparations for the important event ; and I (Heigh-ho!) endeavour to keep up my spirits, by waking dreams of equipage, jewels, fine cloaths, balls, plays, and *bon ton*. Adieu.

Continue to write freely all that passes and let us see which is most conducive to happiness, — love, or grandeur.

I am ever sincerely your's,

CLARA HASTINGS.

LETTER XIV.

Mrs. Sidley to Miss Hastings.

HE is gone, dear Clara, and with him all my joy.—Early last Monday morning the post-chaise drove up to the gate: I heard its unwelcome sound, and awoke my Sidley.—“O my dear Louisa,” cried he, “my heart fails me now the painful hour of separation is arrived!” He started up, with visible alacrity. I hurried on my cloaths, to prepare his breakfast.—He looked extremely elegant in his travelling-dress. I endeavoured to be cheerful;

ful; and he, I fear, put some force on himself, in order to appear sad.

The repast was soon over:—John came in, — “ Every thing is ready.” My weak heart died within me at the sound.—“ Do not continue long away, my Sidley,” my voice faltered. ‘ Only a few weeks at most, my love. Why these emotions for a short separation?’ “ Pardon me, Sir, I know I am very silly; but I shall soon recover myself, when I have leisure for reflection; and, you know, I shall have time enough for that,” smiling through my tears, “ when you are gone.” He folded me in his arms. ‘ I shall not,’ cried he, fervently, ‘ press to my heart so great

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a treasure, till my Louisa flies to welcome my return.' — I could not speak. He hurried into the chaise. I clasped my hands, in an agony, and running, with a kind of wildness, to the top of a little mount that overlooks the road, stood fixed, till my strained eyes could no longer discern the wheels of his carriage, in silent grief. This was childish enough; but my presaging heart forebodes a thousand misfortunes from this excursion. Heaven avert my fears!

And now, my cousin, I have sufficient leisure to think of thy affairs. — Poor Eveling! what a mixture of pain and pleasure flows from our sensibility! You, Clara, have a
happy

happy disposition, not capable of being deeply affected; and yet, I fear, you have more partiality for that amiable man than I could wish, in your present situation. Do you consider the crime of vowing love to one, while your heart gives the preference to another? Will Heaven be propitious to such an union?—Did you ever read the marriage-ceremony? To me, it is extremely awful; though, in this licentious age, little regarded. We have daily proofs of the consequence of that disregard. I hope, however, better things of you.

You want to see which is most conducive to happiness,—a marriage
of

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of interest, or of love ? Neither will, perhaps, be found perfect ; but in the last, we shall have least reason to reproach ourselves : the first is a kind of legal prostitution, from which the delicate mind starts with horror :—how you, with no small share of refinement, can bring yourself to it, is to me surprising : but ambition is a powerful passion ; we have seen it pursued through every crime of which human nature is capable. You, my cousin, will gratify your's only at the expence of perjury ! — Start not—but this must certainly be the case.

Pardon me : I have done. You are by this time, perhaps, enjoying
the

the triumph of your wedding finery ;
that glittering parade, which dazzles
weak eyes and blinds the judgment.
Your vanity will be gratified by ex-
citing the vulgar gaze : you will be
envied ; and envy to some minds is
happiness. — But forgive me : you
may be tempted to fancy I am
amongst the number of the envious :
do me more justice, and believe me,
what I really am,

Your most affectionate friend,

LOUISA SIDLEY.

LETTER XV.

Mr. Sidley to Louisa.

HOW is my love? — I already repent my having left you. I seem still to behold your tears, and to feel your last embrace.

We are weak creatures, ever pursuing what experience tells us is not in this world to be obtained—perfect happiness I mean. Mine was nearly so, and yet I was not content.—We fancy, that change of place will produce it; but if it is not here; that is to say, in our own mind, it is nowhere: yet Hope, sweet delusive
 Hope,

Hope, leads us on, for ever engaging us in new schemes, till, in a better world, the bliss we vainly sought for here is completed.

I met with the most cordial reception from my friend, who is a very worthy fellow, but one who would rather wish those he likes, to share in his affluence, than descend to visit them in their less gay retreats. It is not from pride; but he loves pleasure, and is out of his element when not engaged in dissipation. It is for that reason that he declined my invitation.—He is constant enough in his attachments, and will continue to love his friends while they contribute to his amuse-

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ment; but he has not sentiment enough to seek his friends in their afflictions;—not from want of generosity, or from haughtiness, but because he would shun every thing that might cast a damp on his spirits. He would not refuse them relief, but he would shun their gloomy abodes: he has no talents for visits of condolence.

I find him far gone in every fashionable folly; and that not so much because it is his taste, as because it is the fashion. His house is spacious, and magnificently furnished; his table is covered with all that luxury can bestow; his carriage is superb, and his domestics nume-

rous:

rous : to defray the expence of all this, you may suppose that he has a large estate ; but be the estate what it will, it is the *ton* to live above it, and Mr. Summers is too fond of the *ton* not to follow the example of those who are honoured with that title of distinction. He wants nothing now, he says, but a favourite sultana ; and gaily adds, that I must assist him in the search, “ though,” continues he, “ I fear you are too much rusticated, to be a proper judge of female merit.” ‘ Merit in a kept-mistress !’ cried I, laughing. “ Yes,” returned he, “ a great deal of merit is requisite : — beauty, elegance, caprice, art, and vivacity.” ‘ But for constancy, and, at least, the appearance

of modesty,' said I, 'you are not so unreasonable as to expect it?' "Why, I fear," resumed he, "the former is, indeed, not to be expected; and for the latter, it is entirely out of fashion, even in those who pass for virtuous. You, Sidley, have been but little conversant with your countrywomen, though sufficiently versed in the character of the French and Italians: I must tell you then, that you will find in them all the frivolous levity of the former, with the same propensity to intrigue which distinguish them, but far less wit to embellish their defects, or conceal their vices; and that they have all the beauty of the Italians, without

without so elegant a taste for the *ſça-voir vivre*."

I hope it is only his being acquainted with some of the worst part of the sex, that has given him such unfavourable ideas. You, my amiable Louisa, have inspired me with very different sentiments of the British fair; who, as they are more charming than the women of any other country, are also more eminently virtuous. I speak of them in general: luxury and dissipation may have corrupted some, and the affectation of aping foreign manners, still more; but in their nature they are modest and reserved, the latter foreigners have thought them even

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to a fault. At any rate, I am determined to judge for myself, and not to take characters upon trust. I shall soon have an opportunity of making my remarks, for Mr. Summers has an universal acquaintance with the *beau monde*.

I have been obliged to put myself to some expence, in order to make a proper appearance amidst those elegant circles; but, my love, a little œconomy in the country, where one may live as one pleases, will soon balance the account. I shall, I feel, in a very short time, gratify my curiosity; in a very short time, be sensible of the vanity of those frivolous pleasures which people engage in,
for

for want of knowing the real enjoyments which domestic felicity only can bestow ; and then I shall, with double relish, return to love and my Louisa. — Dress and public places are all that I shall indulge myself in ; for I have made a firm resolution not to be tempted to play, though ever so low ; because when once a taste for gaming is acquired, there is no knowing to what lengths it may carry one. By this means, my dear, I shall give you no room for jealousy, since I stand no chance of being in favour with the ladies, when I do not engage in that amusement, for which most of them seem alone to exist.

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I was weak enough to feel a transient regret, on my first arrival at my friend's, when I compared my situation with his ; but it wore off ; as I discovered that custom had rendered the advantages he derives from his riches and grandeur, so familiar, that he beholds a thousand things with indifference, which, if I could share with my Louisa, would throw me into rapture. I am tempted to think, that we have all nearly an equal portion of happiness bestowed on us ; none of our cups so large as to satisfy our thirst ; but all filled : so that where Fortune lavishes her bounties, it only makes the cup overflow, and the rich thirst on as well as the poor.—It is best to adopt
this

this doctrine, as it will assist us to be content with our lot.

To-night, for the first time, I am to make my appearance at a brilliant *route*. It is at Lady Mary Tryon's, aunt to Mr. Summers; with whom is at present, on a visit, Lady Isabella Conway, in whose praise he is lavish; but who, from his description, I am pretty well convinced, will not suit my taste:—a mere fine lady.

You find, my love, I write to you every trifling occurrence, in order to amuse you. — Trifling will every thing appear to your Charles, while

G 6

you

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you are absent ; though, were you
here, trifles themselves would appear
interesting to him, who is ever, with
unchangeable affection,

Your devoted

C. SIDLEY.

LETTER

L E T T E R XVI.

Mrs. Sidley to Miss Hastings.

W H Y do you not write, my dear Clara?—are you offended at my freedom, or are you so busy in making preparations, in order to part with your own, that you have not leisure to think of any thing else? I will, for the sake of my peace, attribute your silence to the latter.—Let me not lose your friendship, my cousin, whatever other misfortunes I may have to encounter.

Last post brought me a letter
from

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from my wanderer. Nothing material in it. I inclose it, however, in obedience to your request.—You will find, he was going to be introduced to some relations of his friend; Lady Isabella Conway too: — a trifling incident, you will say, for me to remark: — ah! my dear, trifling beginnings have sometimes very serious endings. I have my fears, in regard to that lady; and I will tell you the reason: — In putting away the cloaths my Sidley had worn the day before he left me, a letter dropped from one of the pockets; the very letter (for I easily recollected the hand) which had tempted him to quit our sweet retreat. I reasoned a few moments, whether or no
I should

I should read it; — but from his friend, what need of scruples? — Would I had never seen it! Nothing could be better calculated to make him dissatisfied with his condition, and, above all, with his hasty marriage. I send you a copy of it. You will find that he was marked down as the intended lover of Lady Isabella. Will that fair one easily give up her intended conquest? and will not my Sidley make disagreeable comparisons? — A beautiful young woman of quality; — the humble Louisa. Rank, fortune: — what has he not lost by his precipitancy?

I am extremely low-spirited. My
father

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father is far from well. — The weather begins to grow cold; the winds whistle, the rains descend; I wander forlorn, my books no longer afford me amusement, my music is discord. — I can write no more.

Adieu.

LOUISA.

LETTER

L E T T E R XVII.

Lady Scudamore to Mrs. Sidley.

London.

O Bserve the date of this letter, child, and then make allowance for the tumult of my agitated spirits. Expect no condolence. — How is it possible? Can one single idea bordering on gravity enter this joyful breast? Yes, the amusements of London are wonderfully insipid, to be sure!

I thank you, ye reasoning mortals, who are too wise to be happy: I thank you, with all my heart, for
 having

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having cast your fable cloud of wisdom over my imagination, when I formed an idea of this dear bewitching town. You said, I should be disappointed. True, so I am; for I am ten times more charmed than I expected to be.—You talk to me of the calm, the rational pleasures of the country: what are they, pray? Walking: a wholesome exercise; but in what consists the great wisdom of it? In that way, the brutes excel us:—wandering amidst those said brutes, and gazing, like them, at inanimate objects; sleeping, eating, and repeating the same thing to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow.—But here, hours wing their flight on pleasure's glittering wings.

wings. What so joyful as mixing with one's fellow-creatures, to meet with their best looks, best cloaths, and best tempers; to see the sparkling lights profusely illuminating the highly-ornamented domes; to listen to the most extatic strains that harmony can produce; to weave the mazy dance, to taste the rich repast, to laugh, to chat, to ogle, and to flirt; to have a crowd of *beaux* for ever whispering their civil unmeaning flattery in one's ear; to visit the theatre, and weep the fate of imaginary heroes, or with spirits elate, taste all the sprightliness of the comic muse:—with ten thousand other joys which this dear town can yield!—Amidst such variety, where

is

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is there room for satiety? I have been here a fortnight, and, though I have not lost an hour of my now precious existence, scarcely have I learnt even the names of half the amusements that await me.

Sir Benjamin, (cry him mercy!)
—I had almost forgot to tell you I am married to the honest man; but that, indeed, you might guess, by my being here.—What was I going to say about him? O, —that he has purchased for me the sweetest equipage you ever beheld; and such a profusion of jewels — a charming house too.—But do you know, the odd soul would not make me any settlement for pin-money? though
(and

(and life, you know, is very uncertain) if he should die before me, I shall have a most flourishing jointure.—Well, but in the mean time, it is most vexatious not to have cash at one's command. To be sure, I may have it for asking; but then, if one should lose a little more than usual at play, or so, it will be rather awkward; especially if he should expect to have the Whys and Wherefores answered. — One has always some alloys to one's happiness, you find; but for that, I protest to you, my dear, I do not conceive how mine (had I a conjuring-cap at my command) could be rendered more complete: and even that inconveniency will not be felt
for

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for some months, I trust, or I must be out of luck indeed; since my good aunt made me a present of three hundred pounds, to buy me some ornaments. As I have abundance of these, it shall ornament my purse, till Spadille, Manille, and Basto call it forth.

O, — I have seen your good man. — On my word, an exceeding pretty fellow, with a great deal of the *ton* about him; dresses à *merveille*, and flirts incomparably. Do not be jealous, for I cannot perceive (and I have a tolerable penetration in those matters) that he has formed any attachment, not even with the dreaded Isabella.

Away with your melancholy fears, my dear ; rouse up your spirits, and come amongst us. — Without flattery, you are many degrees handsomer than any woman I have yet seen. But what a childish whim is it, at your time of life, to bury your charms in solitude ! to wither, like a rose in the desert, unseen and unadmired ! It is being ungrateful to nature, who has been lavish of her gifts.—Come to me ; my house, my arms, my heart are open to receive you : — I will take no denial ;—and then your lord and master, by beholding the admiration you excite, will know your value, and, by watching over his treasure, which thousands will covet, his attention will

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will be too much engrossed to leave him leisure to wander.

Now, do you not long to have a description of your supposed rival ? But one woman's description of another is not always so just as one could wish ; and yet, I think, you may trust me, when I tell you that the men all give me the preference to her ladyship. — I am a new face, you will say ;—nay, and a better face too, or my glass belyes me. She is very well, however : good eyes, good teeth, a lively look, an air, and a grace ; her complexion a clear brown, her nose well-formed, and a pretty little ruby mouth, with an arch smile. — Vastly well all this ;

I

but

but your husband says, there is too much of her. She is rather in the pyramidical style, to be sure; much followed, however, much courted, and admired; if not for her person, at least for her fortune: but she seems to set a due value on her precious freedom, nor will easily be caught in the snare of matrimony, while fashion authorizes her to take all decent advantages of her liberty; and her ladyship has not the least tincture of the prude in her composition. Though your *caro sposo* pays no improper attention to her, she honours him with visible marks of distinction. Indeed, it seems to be the *ton*: the

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ladies vie with each other who shall have the merit of teaching him the graces, and initiating him into the mysteries of the *beau monde*.

His friend, Mr. Summers, is a gay dissipated man of fashion, whose chief ambition is to signalize himself as such, by high living, high gaming, and running through his fortune *à-la-mode*.—Nature has endued him with a very decent understanding, and a heart susceptible of the feelings of humanity; but a modish education, and modish examples, rather than inclination, have made him a libertine.

libertine.— I very freely told your husband my sentiments of him, by way of putting him on his guard. I had his character from one who knows him well. Your Sidley, however, vindicated him with all the warmth of friendship.— He seems to have acquired but little knowledge of mankind; is sincere, open, credulous, and (if I may take the liberty to speak my sentiments) virtuous more from the absence of temptation, than from any fixed principle. What I mean is, that he has not that inflexible steadiness which is sufficient to stem the torrent of his passions: — naturally impetuous and eager in

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the pursuit of pleasure, his good-nature and complaisance make him, to gratify others, engage in follies which his reason disapproves. He had made a wise resolution against gaming, (for example) but how could he refuse the ladies? — he hates drinking; but how could he baulk the frolic of his gay friend, who, by way of variety, sometimes engages in a debauch?

Gaiety and dissipation does not so much engross me, but that I have made it my business, for your sake, narrowly to watch his conduct. Such are his connections
here,

here, that it will require more prudence than he seems master of, to preserve him from the infection of their vices. For this reason, my dear cousin, I seriously advise you to hasten to town. I have mentioned you to Sir Benjamin; I have expressed an earnest desire to have you with me. From my description, he longs, no less than I do, for the favour of your company. Perhaps he thinks I stand in need of such a sober matron, to keep me within certain bounds. I can perceive the good man has a little tincture of jealousy in his composition; but though I may flirt, there is but one male crea-

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ture in the world who could tempt me to transgress ; and he, alas ! is far, far away. So may he remain ! —it is best for us both.

Adieu.—Judge of my friendship by the length of this epistle. — I have denied myself airs to-day, as Millamant says : — shut up in my closet ; not a soul admitted ; unmoved at the eloquence of repeated raps : not a single beau to attend at my toilet : I know not how I shall perform the pleasing task without them : their flattery gives that charming glow to the complexion, that vivacity to the eyes.—Come, ye Graces ! and supply

ply their place; dress me for conquest; for I am going to an assembly where half the fine women in England will display their charms. Sidley will be there. — Once more adieu.

CLARA SCUDAMORE.

L E T T E R XVIII.

Mrs. Sidley to Lady Scudamore.

YOU terrify me, dear Clara.—
I tremble for the morals of my husband. —I tremble for his constancy too, in spite of your well-meant assurances of his not having yet formed any connections. But can his heart long continue insensible to the allurements of women who stop at nothing to add to their conquests, that they may gratify their vanity? — How wretched should I be! — the very thought drives me to distraction. I could
patiently

patiently bear every ill but the loss of his affections. — I fear I am naturally a little inclined to jealousy : and I feel too, that I should be as miserable were he but to give any other woman the preference, — were he but to think her more amiable than me, I should be as miserable, I say, as if he had gone all the lengths of an intrigue : my delicacy could not brook the least deviation ; for if once his heart began to wander, I should look upon him as lost to me for ever. He might change the object of his passion a thousand times ; but never would that heart return to its first attachment : — let my conduct

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be what it would, the utmost I could hope for would be his esteem. — Ah, how cold a sentiment! Tired perhaps at last with roving, he would be what people call reclaimed; he might return to me: but how return? with a heart exhausted, where cold indifference had taken up its residence? How different from the tender union that has hitherto subsisted! I could not support the change;—such a state of apathy!

You bid me hasten to town; but how, my cousin, can I accept your kind invitation? Can I leave my father, in his present situation? who
then

A N O V E L. 155

then will smoothe the pillow for his languid head? who soothe his pain under the pressure of sickness? No; be the consequence what it will, I must not, cannot leave the author of my being, when he stands so much in need of my assistance. Not long, I fear, will this be the case. The change of his fortune sits heavy on his heart: the recollection of past scenes, and a too late sense of imprudence, prey upon his mind; his health daily declines.

Sidley writes frequently to me; but I already fancy I can perceive a coolness in his stile. Love is

H 6

only

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only nursed in solitude; absence naturally weakens our attachments.

Adieu. I must attend my father.—Favour me with the particulars of all that passes, and accept a thousand thanks for your goodness, with my best compliments to Sir Benjamin.

Adieu.

LOUISA SIDLEY.

LETTER

L E T T E R XIX.

Mr. Sidley to Louisa.

MY heart sympathizes with my beloved. I know your tender feelings, and consequently what you must suffer for your father's melancholy situation. Nothing but a prudent regard to our mutual interest could keep me from you; but I must not suffer my friends to forget me, when they seem so favourably disposed to advance my fortune. Mr. Summers has a numerous acquaintance; some of them men in power. He
has

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has already procured for me the promise of a place under the government. — I will not condescend to become a fervile levee-hunter; but a proper attendance is requisite. This will detain me some time longer in town. Indeed, as this plan is in agitation, I think it will be necessary for us both to spend the winter here: the expence must not be a bar, when we have a prospect of being so amply repaid. I would therefore, my dear girl, have you, if Mr. Palmer can bear to be removed, come to me as soon as possible; or, if he is in as much danger as you apprehend, a few weeks will, most probably,

bably, release you from your filial task. You must endeavour to reconcile yourself to the event. I will not offer any common-place arguments by way of consolation, your own good sense will suggest all that can be said on the subject.

All the pleasures of this gay town cannot console me for your absence. I never enjoy myself so much as when *tête-à-tête* with your charming cousin; for then my Louisa is our constant theme. — She is a fine creature; all the men here are dying for her: but though her vivacity may encourage
their

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their advances, she acts, upon the whole, with so much discretion, that even the prudes have not yet found an occasion to demolish her character. Sir Benjamin is an odd mortal ; it gratifies his vanity to see her admired ; yet he is ridiculously jealous.

I fear she will, when grandeur and gaiety are become familiar to her, find an aching void in her heart, which she has put it out of her power to fill up.—The more I see of those fashionable marriages, the more I applaud my own conduct in my disinterested choice of the most amiable of women.

Adieu,

Adieu, my love. I am going to write to Sir John Belville, a friend, whom I hope ere long to have the pleasure of introducing to my Louisa.—I contracted an acquaintance with him while on my travels. He is handsome, sensible, spirited, and, barring a few fashionable vices, has great merit.

A-propos of those fashionable vices; I had almost forgot to thank my sweet girl for her dear half-chiding sermon. I do assure you, I read it with great attention, and will endeavour to profit by it.—You say true, the giving soft names to crimes doth not alter their nature.

Nothing

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Nothing can be more just. — But
the hair-dresser is come. I am
sorry to be interrupted. One lives
here in a constant hurry.

Adieu, my angel. — Believe me
ever your's,

SIDLEY.

LETTER

L E T T E R XX.

Mr. Sidley to Sir John Belville.

I Solemnly assure you, dear Belville, you are mistaken in regard to Lady Bell. My vanity may indeed be a little gratified by that notice which caprice has tempted her to distinguish me with ; but, positively, she is not to my taste. You will, perhaps, be as angry at this declaration, as when you thought me your rival ; but it is fact nevertheless. She is too masculine, too — too —, I can hardly describe what I mean. —
Were

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Were you to see my sweet Louisa, however, you would easily conceive, that the man who loved her *à la folie*, could never be struck with her ladyship: and yet, I own, she is an exceeding fine woman; that she has an excellent cultivated understanding, an infinity of wit, and that as a companion, or for a little *badinage*, I know no one whom I would prefer to her. But, laugh at me as you please, my morals would not suffer me for one moment, were she more tempting, to behold her with improper views. My sacred, and not yet repented of engagement with my Louisa; my regard for the lady's honour, as
well

well as my own, would not suffer me to form designs upon her; so that you find, my dear Jack, from Sidley you have nothing to fear.— But to speak freely, I think, on the other hand, you have as little to hope from her ladyship. She will not easily be caught in the snare of matrimony: though I will not answer for her forming other connections; for she piques herself on despising the fixed and settled rules; bids defiance to censure, while her own heart acquits her; and depends on the strength of her virtue alone, without condescending to make use of those guards which females of a more timid disposition think

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think requisite. Her own sex, indeed, she despises, and treats above half ours on the same footing as she does her monkey: and yet I am much deceived if her heart is not vulnerable; nay, if she is not capable of loving with all the violence of uncontrollable passion, though she affects to ridicule the little effeminising God. I have freely told her as much. Nothing makes her so angry; I am sure of a good rap with her fan on the occasion: but, for all her airs, I have seen her look such things!

I wish, for her family's sake, nay, for her own sake, she was
well

well married; but indeed, my friend, I do not wish you so much ill, as that you should be her husband. — Continue your excursion, if you find benefit from absence. This advice is highly disinterested, since I never stood more in need of your advice, besides the pleasure I always reap from your society.

You know the scrape I got into before you left us. — Gaming is certainly the d—l. I, who had made so many wise resolutions against it! — The rascals (known sharpers) will hear of no compromise. Summers has offered; but no, I will die ere I condescend to
receive

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receive any pecuniary favours.—I depend on the promise of my friends, in regard to the place solicited for me; that I may with honour receive; and the hopes of that supports my spirits: if that fails, positively I am ruined; for my estate, in this cursed emergency, is mortgaged to its full value. Debts of honour must be paid. Ridiculous! to pay a set of known villains, and refuse the same justice to the industrious trader! Horrid as this is, it is the maxim of the world. Indeed, I must pay the harpies, to silence them; since not for the earth would I have my Louisa acquainted with

I

my

my folly and imprudence. Alas ! it would break her gentle heart. I must send for her to town, if her father dies, which is hourly expected ; for my creditors, I fear, would not give me leave of absence : — but the place will set all to rights.—In this dear bewitching town, let one make what resolutions one will, there is no living within bounds.

I tell you freely the state of my affairs, not supposing that a man will be the less esteemed for having had the spirit to ruin himself ; which is at present the height of the *ton*.—Belville, I look upon you

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in a superior light from a mere worldly friend ; and, in return, I am most sincerely

Your's,

C. SIDLEY.

I shall spend this evening with the old set. Would you were to be of the party ! I will once more push my fortune, though it should be my last stake. We will hope better things. — My spirits are light, who knows but I may retrieve all ? Then, then my Louisa, cured of his roving, will thy wanderer return to peace and thee.

Adieu !

LETTER

L E T T E R XXI.

Lady Scudamore to Mrs. Sidley.

YOU are too apprehensive, my dear. — Sidley, to be sure, is not quite what I could wish; nevertheless, he is a faint, in comparison to most of our young men of fashion: and I verily believe, in spite of absence and temptations, you still enjoy the first place in his affections. Hasten to us, however, — he will not be the worse for your presence, — if my uncle can be removed; if not, I neither wish you to

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do it, nor, I am persuaded, would any arguments prevail on you to leave him. His illness, I must take leave to say, was rather *mal-à-propos*; but so are most things in this life, I think.

I am as peevish as an old maid to-day. This teasing man! — I would not give a pinch of snuff for his fondness, when he gives no other proofs of it but a few monkey-tricks, and loves and dears. To pretend to love one, and yet to refuse what is requisite to one's happiness! — Heavens! when I first came here, I thought two or three hundred pounds would last one
half

half a century ; but when so many hours are dedicated to the card-table, except Fortune is very propitious, how soon is such a sum lost ! What horrid luck some people have ! But I am sure, half the old dowagers in town have learnt sleight of hand. — I often, last night, thought of Lady Townley. Such cards were enough to make a parson swear :—and then, when I came home, to be lectured by my old soul of a husband ; — and this morning to behold in my glass such languid eyes, such pale cheeks, such haggard looks ! — Heigh-ho !

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Eveling, had I been content to wander through the leafy grove with thee, instead of being stifled in crowded assemblies, the roseate bloom, the dimpled smiles, would not have forsaken this faded face. And would not the soft emotions, awakened by thy soothing tale, have communicated as much happiness as I experience, while, though blazing in jewels, I sit racked between hope and fear, when avarice is the only passion that finds entrance to my breast?

After all, Louisa, the parade of equipage, the glare of dress, the bustle of public places, can only,
while

while their novelty continues, awakened raptures : when oft repeated, the fluttering heart sinks to rest, exhausted with agitations which were not formed to interest it, and then leaves the senses to make what they can, without its aid, of the unmeaning toys. — Do not triumph on this confession, cousin, and fancy that I approve your plan of matrimony more than my own : — the truth is, I believe honest St. Paul made a sagacious speech, when he said “ Those who marry do well ; but those who continue single do better.”

I have not seen your husband this

I 4

week :

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week : I know not what is become of him. Lady Bell rolls her sparkling eyes about, but no Sidley meets their glances. If you had not, by some means or other, put it into my head, as well as your own, that she may, somehow or other, become your rival (by which you have prejudiced me against her) I believe I should have been tempted to cultivate her friendship. As it is, I am absolutely compelled to admire her. She has a grace, a dignity about her, which is so natural and unaffected, that I think a noble mind alone could inspire it. She has a frankness too, which seems
to

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to speak a heart unconscious of guilt. I have heard a thousand instances of her generosity: — but with all these perfections, she has an equal number of faults. She is haughty, satirical, and, to a degree, bordering on the masculine; despising those forms and restrictions imposed on our sex; which, I should think, a libertine mind alone would deem severe. The men follow her in crowds; but she follows the only one who flies her!

I fear, it is a less gentle passion than love which now reigns paramount in his bosom. I wish he

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may not have got amongst a set of sharpers. — Summers may make ducks and drakes of his money, if he thinks proper; he is a single man, and the sooner he is ruined, the less he will have to do; that is his affair. — Do not be alarmed, however; I have only some slight suspicions. I shall make it my business to find Sidley, and then will endeavour to sound him; and, if possible, will prevail on him to pay you a visit, since you cannot come to us. He has promises, and hopes, and all that stuff; but if his friends really mean to serve him, they must have short memories indeed, if his constant presence is requisite

requisite to keep them in mind of him.

Sir Benjamin has just been with me. Would you believe it? he tells me, business demands his presence in the country, and that I must prepare to attend him there next Monday, at farthest. — *Must*, did he say? — On my word! — But adieu, my dear; I have not patience to write. — Depend on my seeing Sidley before I set off. I will either send him to you, or take him with me.

Your's, &c.

LETTER XXII.

Mr. Sidley to Lady Scudamore.

O My charming, my amiable cousin, what shall I say?— I am the most wretched, the most imprudent of men! But for goodness sake, for friendship's sake, shield my Louisa: let not the fatal tale of my undoing reach her ears: let her not know that all her pious prayers for my protection have been fruitless; that I have long been abandoned by Heaven; and that vice has so perverted my mind, that I have abandoned every thing

thing that is virtuous and excellent, except herself. Yes, assure her, that in the midst of all my errors, she never lost her empire over my heart. But, wretch that I am, could I be said to love her, while, to gratify my passion, I sat deliberately down, and, at one cast of the dice, condemned her to poverty? — Distracting thought! let her not know it. Take her under your protection, my ever-indulgent friend; soothe her sorrow: say that business has obliged me to leave London for some time: — take her into the country with you. — O! what must be her sufferings! — her father dead, as I hear, and no kind friend.

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friend at hand to console her! —
What a monster must she think
me! But, alas! long, long will it
be ere we meet again.

Ask me not where I am: no
one enquires for me now: then
why should you?—only be a friend
to my love, and let fate dispose as
it sees fit of the unfortunate

SIDLEY.

LETTER

L E T T E R XXIII.

Lady Isabella Conway to Miss West.

C O M E to me immediately, my dear ; I am in the utmost agitation. — Sidley has run his race : he is ruined. That charming man, so formed to enjoy life ; but, alas ! so circumscribed in his fortune.— Only fools are fortunate.

I make no scruple to acknowledge to you my regard for him ; my passion, if you choose to call it so. My heart, invulnerable to all his sex besides, was formed in union

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son with his. I glory in my attachment, though it is hopeless. I will manifest it by every act of disinterested generosity in my power: but so noble are my sentiments, that, I think, I would not wish he should love me, if he could; for to say truth, it is pity that he should:—but who shall hinder me from loving him, while I do not rob his too happy wife of his affections? What right has she to be offended at my feelings? shall she alone be sensible of his merit? shall she alone experience the power of his charms?—But this enchanting subject runs away with my pen.—Ah! when I recollect

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lect where he is! — Hasten with me, Maria, to the horrid prison: my gold shall soon make the strong-barred gates give way, and release their lovely captive.

Adieu. — I wait for you: — be muffled up. — A hack shall convey us.

Your's, &c.

I. CONWAY.

LETTER

L E T T E R XXIV.

Miss West to Lady Bell Conway.

HOW unfortunate! — Be assured, my friend, nothing but necessity should have prevailed on me to refuse your request. — The carriage was at the door, my father in it, my maid held my cloak in her hand, ready to put it on, that I might accompany him, at the moment I received your note. — It was not an airing, or a mere visit, else would I have apologized, and disengaged myself; but we were on the wing to attend my

my aunt Eleanor, at her country-feat, who was suddenly taken ill; and here I am still. — But, dear Lady Bell, let me know how you have settled the affair. Favour me with all the particulars of your uncommon visit.—Some of our sex would call it imprudent; but I know you noble; I know the goodness of your heart, and can, with all your singularity, esteem you: nay, I know you have more virtue than half the prudes in town; but yet I could, for your sake, wish that Sidley had never been born, since, pure as your passion is, it can only serve to torment you.—Adieu, my dear.

I am

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I am tempted, on the contrary, to wish this teasing old woman heartily in love : it would be something to employ her thoughts; consequently, she would think more, and speak less. At present, if one may judge by the nothingness of what she says, she speaks merely for want of thought.

I am, dear Lady Bell,

Your's, &c.

M. WEST.

LETTER

L E T T E R XXV.

Lady Isabella Conway to Miss West.

TELL you all?—O, my dear,
 such a scene!—I want words.
 —In the most horrid of all wretched
 apartments, furnished only with
 a kind of a couch by way of bed,
 a broken stool, and a table no less
 out of repair, did I find the most
 elegant, the most lovely of his sex.
 He that would adorn a throne,
 lay stretched on a bed, hardly fit
 to receive the meanest of beg-
 gars.

It

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It was dusk ere I reached the prison ; and in that dismal abode total darkness prevailed, save a few glimmering rays of light that twinkled from a lamp, placed on his table. He had, as I before said, thrown himself on his bed. He was dressed in deep mourning [I have since found, it was on account of the death of his father-in-law] ; his fine hair hung dishevelled over his shoulders, and partly shaded his face ; his eyes were closed, and his hands, the fingers clasped in each other, pressed upon his forehead. — As my entrance did not rouse him, I stood some time, pleased with an opportunity

opportunity of gazing on him unobserved: at last, however, he uttered a deep sigh, and started up, exclaiming, "Poor, poor Louisa!"

As he uttered this, he chanced to glance his eyes to where I stood.

—He was struck dumb with astonishment. I instantly endeavoured to dispel it, by saying, in a composed manner, "Do not be surprized, Mr. Sidley, to see me here; friendship will make its way, in spite of bolts and bars."

'Friendship!' repeated he, 'Can the undone Sidley still hope to possess so great a blessing?' "Yes, Sir; and in me you shall find a friend who will not rest in empty professions.

professions. I come to have the
 happiness to release you." "Is it pos-
 sible, Madam? — How far nobler
 are your sex's sentiments than ours!
 You excite my warmest gratitude,
 my highest admiration! — But par-
 don me, Madam, I am already
 fallen too low. The sense of an
 obligation, such as you offer,
 would, added to my other wretch-
 ed feelings, be too much to bear."
 "Permit me, Sir, to ask a con-
 cise state of your affairs. — Excuse
 me, I will not be refused an an-
 swer to my question, at least." "It
 is a painful task, Madam; but yet
 few words will suffice: — I am
 ruined, totally ruined. My little
 estate

estate I lost at the gaming-table: with desperate madness I risked my all. The harpies who undid me, now enjoy the spoil. My other more honourable debts, or at least those debts which true honour would have made me most solicitous to discharge, are still unpaid, and must, I fear, remain so. They amount to about one hundred and thirty pounds. I have no resource, since what is left by Mr. Palmer shall be wholly appropriated to the use of my Louisa'—[he paused a few moments, unable to proceed for his emotions]—‘and small, I fear, will the pittance be,’ added he, clasp-

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ing his hands, at the same time raising his moistened eyes to heaven. "Do not give way to dependency, dear Mr. Sidley" (I could not for the life of me help the tear); "only submit yourself to my management, and all will yet be well." 'O, Madam!' shaking his head. "I must have my own way, Sir: and in the first place, a coach waits at the gate, to convey you from this horrid place." He sighed. "Excuse me, Madam; I am sensible of your goodness, but I must endeavour—My wife's cousin, perhaps—" "It is well, Sir," cried I, chagrined at his obstinacy; "but Lady Scudamore
more

more cannot, you well know, assist you; and as to Sir Benjamin, I believe indeed he loves you better than any thing in the world, except his money.—What I offer is a mere trifle. I am uncontrouled mistress of my fortune; and I protest, I know not any one worthy person in your situation, whom I would not with equal chearfulness relieve. Consider, Sidley, what anguish your Louisa will suffer, when she knows where you are. Can you bear the thoughts of that? Must the knowledge of your wretchedness be added to her grief for the loss of a parent? Who but you can support her spirits in her

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present situation ?” ‘ In her present situation !’ cried he ; ‘ Ah ! that thought !—Unfortunate offspring ! The thought unmans me.—I yield, Madam,’ added he, casting himself at my feet, ‘ save my Louisa !’

I had stretched out my hand to raise him ; he pressed it to his lips. At that moment the door flew open, and a lady in deep mourning rushed in, with her arms extended, calling out, “ Where, where is my Sidley ?” She saw me ; she saw him at my feet. She stopped short, as if struck with lightning : her arms continued extended, her fine eyes were raised to heaven.

heaven. I never beheld so elegant, so striking a figure. — Well may he love her as he does; she is, in person and face, the most angelic creature I ever beheld. For some time we all, without having a sufficient degree of recollection to move or speak, continued in the same posture, only that Sidley had as it were involuntarily quitted my hand, and turned towards his Louisa, though still kneeling. She changed colour; he started up, and, just in time to save her from sinking on the floor, caught her in his arms. My smelling-bottle was of use. Some hartshorn and water, brought by the people, soon

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restored her. She found herself in her husband's arms, her head reclined on his shoulder; but on turning her eyes, she beheld me, and seemed to shrink from him with a kind of horror; on which, stepping back a few paces, and assuming a manly look of firmness, and no less dignity, "Louisa," said he, "I never deceived you: deceit is not in my nature. Do me justice: judge not by appearances. That lady is the most noble, the most generous of women. To her I am going to be indebted for my freedom. She it is who restores me to you with disinterested friendship."

‘Perhaps,

‘Perhaps, Sir,’ interrupted I, ‘it cannot be called wholly disinterested, since, besides the pleasure it will give me to contribute to the happiness of so amiable a pair, I must likewise aspire to the honour of your friendship in return:—And you, charming Louisa,’ added I, ‘will one day, I hope, esteem me worthy of your’s. Mr. Sidley says, deceit is not in his nature: equally do I detest it. — I have long, Madam, beheld Mr. Sidley with partiality. I could not be blind to his merit; I could not help seeing that he was far more amiable than the generality of his sex: but I call Heaven to witness,

K 4

I never,

200 THE RELAPSE,

I never, for one moment, beheld him in any other light than as the husband of a lady, whom report spoke worthy of that constant attachment which, on all occasions, he manifested. I now need not depend on report; I see so many charms in you, Madam, that you need not fear a rival. Long,' added I, with fervour, 'may you be happy in each other! I shall be no less happy in the pleasing reflection, that I have contributed to your felicity.'—So saying, I hastily left the room.

I had brought my attorney with me. I found he had dispatched the

the business, and settled every thing with the creditors. I then discharged what was due for fees, &c. and, bidding the gaoler go and acquaint his prisoner of his freedom, and that a carriage waited to convey him where he thought proper, I stepped into another hack, and returned home, satisfied with my adventure. And yet, Heigh-ho! happy Louisa!

But I will conquer all the woman in me. Friendship, which is of neither sex, shall alone keep possession of

Your's, &c.

ISABELLA CONWAY.

LETTER XXVI.

Mrs. Sidley to Lady Scudamore.

ALL your well-meant precautions were in vain, my dear cousin. Ill news flies fast.—Hardly had I paid the last solemn duties to my parent; while yet drowned in unaffected tears for his loss, the fatal tidings of my Sidley's ruin reached my ears. Stunned with so severe a blow, I continued for some days in a state bordering on stupefaction.—When I was able to recollect my scattered senses, I delayed not one moment. Instead
of

of waiting, as you requested, till you came for me, I collected in haste every thing of value that I could carry with me, and instantly set off for London. A long journey it seemed; but though infinitely fatigued both in body and mind, I stopped not to refresh myself, but hurried on to the horrid prison.

I hardly know how I reached the door of his wretched apartment. The gaoler opened it: I rushed in—But judge, dear cousin, what I must feel, when I beheld my Sidley at the feet of a graceful female; whose eyes were bent

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down to him with tender complacency! She appeared to me extremely handsome. By the height and dignity of her form, I instantly concluded her to be the long-dreaded Lady Isabella: — nor was I deceived. — To her I owe my Sidley's freedom; and, would we accept further favours, her liberal mind would know no bounds to her generosity: but we are already too much indebted. Sidley pines under a sense of the obligation, and, with more severity than I can bear, reproaches himself for his imprudence. — Ah! could he but obtain his own pardon as easily as (ere he could ask) mine was granted,

ed, we yet might be restored to peace; but he is deeply hurt by the ingratitude of his pretended friends, and his loss of fortune is a severe wound to his pride.

Since I came to town, we have been employed in disposing of the plate, &c. which I brought with me. We live in a retired part of the town. No one is made acquainted with our lodgings but our benefactress. Notwithstanding some disagreeable feelings which her presence, in spite of my better judgment, excites, I must do her the justice to say, she has a noble way of thinking, and
many

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many amiable qualities. She is remarkably sensible too. I esteem her, and would love her, if I could; nay, sometimes; when Sidley behaves particularly reserved to her, I fancy I do; for to be regarded with coolness by him, renders her an object of pity. He is grateful for her favours, more so than she wishes: she says, it is a mark of want of friendship, where an obligation is so disagreeably felt:—but she should consider, that his temper is hurt at present by his circumstances; and even to me, though he instantly recollects himself, he is sometimes almost peevish.

She

She honours us with frequent visits; she strives to dispel our, or rather my Sidley's, melancholy (for now he is restored to me, I seem insensible of every other misfortune) by her agreeable conversation; but it has little effect on him. She does not stop at such common instances of friendship:—as she cannot prevail on us to receive any more pecuniary favours, she, by a number of delicate stratagems, betrays us into acceptance of a thousand little delicacies for our table: they are left at our house, delivered to the cook, dressed, and brought up, ere we know any thing of the matter.

Sidley

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Sidley has taxed her with being the giver, even chidingly ; but she constantly denies having the least knowledge of it.—“ But if I did,” said she, the other day, “ thou churl, who wilt not suffer me to enjoy the highest pleasure that riches can confer on the possessor, would it be any thing more than an act of common kindness, considering Mrs. Sidney’s present situation ? Go ! you deserve not the honour of being a father.”—I coloured exceedingly at this free speech. Sidney tenderly folded me in his arms, uttering a deep sigh.

We have never yet had leisure
to

to examine my poor father's will; but are to have his attorney here to-morrow morning. I judge by his last affecting words, that what little he has left, is wholly settled on me. But what of that? Freely, most freely will I give it up.—What sort of a wife must that be, who would wish to be independent of her husband?

Adieu, my dear cousin. We will, if possible, accept your's and Sir Benjamin's kind invitation.—Your letter is just delivered to me: it has lain some time at Belmont. Excuse my sudden flight from thence, and giving you the trouble of a fruitless journey.

I am

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I am ever sincerely your's; nor
can I ever doubt the return you
make to my friendship. I know,
my dear, much is not in your
power. Adieu, once more.

Affectionately your's,

LOUISA SIDLEY.

LETTER

LETTER XXVII.

The same to the same.

MY father's will has been read. — After paying his debts, the remainder of his estate will be about a hundred and fifty pounds a year, besides the pretty little cottage in which he had for some time resided, and which is furnished with an elegant simplicity.

Belmont, I find, is entirely disposed of, and all its contents, except the library ; which my Sidley made a point of securing from the wreck

wreck of his fortune.—But a hundred and fifty pounds a year still left! Heavens! a treasure beyond my expectations. A house too!—What more can we desire? I shall be rich in content, at least, by suiting my mind to my circumstances, if I can but see my Sidley restored to peace.

Lady Bell has been here this morning. She has warmly congratulated us on the little independency which is still left: but she would be much better satisfied, would we permit her to enlarge it. On the contrary, Sidley's pride, or perhaps other motives, has set him already

already on thinking of a mortgage, to pay off the debt we owe her.— I shall ever act as he thinks proper in those affairs.

Adieu, my dear Clara. — We shall, in about a week or ten days, set off for Bushy Farm, and will, if possible, take your seat in our way; or rather go out of our way to pay you our respects. — Best compliments to Sir Benjamin.—Excuse a short letter, I am in haste.

Affectionately your's,

LOUISA SIDLEY.

LETTER

LETTER XXVIII.

Lady Scudamore to Mrs. Sidley.

JOY, joy! my dear cousin.—
Moderate as your present circumstances are, the delivery of your husband from a horrid confinement, and being freed from debt, besides the salutary lesson which adversity must have taught him,—all demand my congratulations.—Your income is but small, to be sure; but experience has a little rectified my judgment, and I begin to fancy that it is possible to exist without a coach and six: nay,
that

that riches and grandeur are not such infallible antidotes for the heart-ach as I imagined.

Heigh-ho! — Your vile affairs have quite unhinged me. To be surrounded with such affluence, and yet not to have a guinea at my command to assist a friend! Horrid! — What do the fellows mean, when they say, upon a certain stupid occasion, “With all my worldly goods I thee endow?”

You talk like a child, cousin, when you cry out, “What must that wife be, who would wish to be independent of her husband?” —

A mighty

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A mighty pretty sentiment ! but, take my word for it, that woman is a fool who enters into the delectable state, without seeing her settlement properly signed, sealed, and delivered. Those that trust to their generosity, trust to a broken reed. I might have seen enough of that at home, in the case of my good mother ; but my giddy head dreamt of nothing but dress, equipage, and dear London.

Sir Benjamin has got the gout. He, forsooth, expects me to be his nurse : let him pay me then. He should have excited my gratitude, by granting my request ;
which

which would have put it in my power.—But I hate the subject. A stranger has had the honour of doing that for you, which your friend would have gloried in. — Never offer to say any thing in his defence, for I think, positively, I never can forgive him. Kindness will entice me to discharge my duty, when neither, independant of that, divine nor human laws will avail. Though I could not be expected to love the old soul, (cry him mercy) yet he might, by a proper conduct, have merited my respect. I was once in a fair way of regarding him as my friend, of esteeming him as such; but he is

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an illiberal animal. No vice so contracts the heart as avarice: it is a baleful weed, which poisons every plant of virtue that attempts to spring up in the soul.

There now, Sir Knight, I have vented my indignation, and my mind will perhaps be more at ease: though I have other causes of vexation. — To be shut up in the country with a sick husband; to be pestered with one's ridiculous neighbours; poor Eveling, too, ruining himself as fast as he can. The gaming-table and the opera-girls will soon do his business. — How little real delicacy have the
most

I hastened to her. She rose to meet me. "Where is he? O, Mr. Eveling, where are the cold remains of my Sidley?"—How her figure struck me! She held her handkerchief in her hand, her fine eyes were raised to heaven, her face pale as death.—"I have lost him, Mr. Eveling," cried she; "all I held dear on earth. My Sidley is dead and cold. I shall never more hear his charming voice, never more behold his looks of cordial love. O thou world!" continued she, "how shall I now support the weight of my miserable existence?—My Sidley! my husband! best beloved of men! I have lost thee

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for ever !”—She burst into a flood of tears. At last, wiping off the pearly drops, she turned to me, with a more composed air, “ Yes, I will see thee once again : I will gaze upon that dear face, before it is for ever hid from my eyes.”

I led her, in silence, to the apartment where they had placed his coffin. As we advanced, her whole frame was agitated. She disengaged herself from me, and hastily advanced towards it. — Poor Sidley ! — How awful is the sight of death !—What a change appeared in his late animated countenance ! — She stood looking on
him,

him, her hands clasped in each other, and appeared like a statue, the statue of despair. At last she stooped down. She repeatedly kissed his cold lips, she bathed his face with her tears, but uttered not one single complaint; then heaving a deep sigh, "farewel, my first, my last, my only love, farewel for ever."—She turned and gave me her hand, with such an air of anguish, yet with a dignity in her grief, that made her appear something more than human. — "Lead me, Sir," said she; "let me go and seek consolation where alone it is to be found."—I conducted her to the door of her

L 3 apartment.

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apartment.—May Heaven support her !

I returned to my beloved Clara, who stood almost as much in need of consolation ; for never women better loved each other. They have been friends from childhood, and, I hope, will now end their days together ; for I do not believe that ever Louisa will be prevailed on to make a second choice.

I know not yet the fate of that wretched creature Isabella : but, sooner or later, I doubt not, she will meet the fate she merits.—
If you can gain any intelligence
of

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of her, be so obliging as to let me know.

I am, dear Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

EVELING.

F I N I S.